

The Disciplinary Terrains of Soul and Self-Government in the First Map of the Educational Sciences (1879-1911)

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ABSTRACT:

In this paper I intend to show that the historical sedimentation of a coherent discourse, both regarding the scientific status of pedagogy and regarding the aims of the modern educational act, must be understood in the general framework of the moral and the expansion of the policy of self-government. I argue that a pedagogic discourse was formed at the end of the 19th century embracing the core of ethical material, assimilating it to the axiom of illuminist-humanist power which tells us that the civic behavior of the citizen must arise from the commitments and decisions of the private sphere of his consciousness.

KEYWORDS:

Moral and School Discipline, Modern Pedagogy, Educational Sciences, Governmentality/self-government

“The aim of all education, we must never forget, is to shape the child for independence, making him able to govern himself” (Élie Pécaut, 1887).

In this paper I intend to show that the historical sedimentation of a coherent discourse, both regarding the scientific status of pedagogy and regarding the aims of the modern educational act, must be understood in the general framework of the moral and the expansion of the policy of self-government. I argue that a pedagogic discourse was formed at the end of the 19th century embracing the core of ethical material, assimilating it to the axiom of illuminist-humanist power which tells us that the civic behavior of the citizen must arise from the commitments and decisions of the private sphere of his consciousness.

The analysis focuses on a relatively short historical period. I will discuss the so-called Compayré Moment, giving it the name coined by Nanine Charbonnel (1988), and which is demarcated by the publication, in 1879, by Gabriel Compayré, of the *Histoire critique des doctrines de l'éducation en France* and the articles on “Education” and “Pédagogie” that Durkheim published in 1911 in the *Nouveau dictionnaire de pédagogie*, under the stewardship of Ferdinand Buisson. I will discuss the texts from an entire generation of Francophone pedagogues who predominantly reflected on the epistemological status of the Sciences of Education and who systematized an encyclopedic knowledge

based on an education and teaching with modern characteristics.

I aim to show that government of the soul or disciplinary training of the will of the pupil was at the core of reform proposals defended by this group of pedagogues.

My idea is to continue a theoretical reflection begun by Michel Foucault in his final writings. He defined a field of analysis therein, which allowed permanent crossing of the domains of ethics and politics. The term *governmentality* and the expression *technologies of the self*, interoperating with each other and clarifying each other, are what best define the inflexion operated in his last historiographical projects, looking to understand the basis on which modern practices of *subjectivation* have been built in modernity (Foucault, 1978, 1988). This analytical perspective has many ramifications in current social research. I am particularly inspired by the critical works of Nikolas Rose, in the fields of power-knowledge that characterize the social affirmation and consolidation of the psychological science, and the way that Thomas Popkewitz questions educational theory and pedagogical research with his works on the self and the other (Rose, 1996; Popkewitz, 1998). Analyzing the discursive devices, through which the actors are represented, classified and standardized, these researchers enable us to understand the schooling of the masses either as a human technology or as a moral technology. They show us how the dynamics of promotion

of subjectivity intertwine profoundly with the goals of government of the populations.

RATIONALIZATION OF CONDUCT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE DEFINITION OF THE EDUCATION SCIENCES

I begin my reflection with two questions asked by Gabriel Compayré in 1885: is there a science of education or not, and is its object different to the rest of the social sciences that were establishing themselves at the time? The author of *Cours de pédagogie théorique et pratique*, immediately came up with an answer: “nobody disputes the viability of an educational science today”. Thus, Compayré made a distinction between pedagogy — which would be the theory of education — and education, which constitutes the practice of pedagogy. “There is indeed a science of education, a practical and applied science, whose principles, laws and vitality are documented by a large number of publications”. From the methodological conceptual perspective, pedagogy aspired to make itself legitimate solely as an *applied psychology*. The science of education took as its rules the maxims that derived from the laws of mental organization, (i.e. the work developed by the psychological science). This is the fundamental reason underpinning this marriage “psychology is the source of all applied sciences that are related to the moral faculties of man; pedagogy contains all the parts of the soul and must use always psychology” (Compayré, 1885, pp. 10-13).

Moreover, we see how an apparently innocent sentence, because it is centered only on the aspect of the epistemological framework of a discipline, allows one clearly to understand the forms of specific social regulation. From the beginning, pedagogy, or the science of education, took on the ambition to act on the spirit and the body of children and the young. It arose, historically, as another version of *bio-power*. Its method would consist only in observing the facts of the physical and moral life of man. Its biggest problem was making each subject visible and able to be manipulated. This task was only imagined possible if undertaken through systematic dissection of the spirituality of the educated subject: the general laws and respective inductive

reflection of pedagogy would focus on obtaining the rational construction of intimate facts, in order to establish fully the map of the human soul.

From the very start, speaking about the object of the new science was to speak about the possibility of a laic moral. From Compayré I will move on to another author, Henri Marion, bearing in mind the article “Pédagogie” that he wrote in the first version of the influential *Dictionnaire de pédagogie et d’instruction primaire*. Marion began by reproducing Littré’s classic definition, according to which pedagogy is the moral education of children, and all his considerations derive from this standpoint. The entirely ethical substance obliged him to discuss the position of discipline in the general spectrum of the sciences. Marion had no doubts that this prevented it from being classified in the exact sciences, which based their reasoning on sequences of pure and complex notions. Pedagogy was not similar to the physical and natural sciences, because it could never purport to attain laws of absolute necessity and infallibility. However, this ambiguity, or rather, this positional uncertainty did not pose a problem for Marion. It was instead a reality that pedagogy shared “with the whole family of the moral sciences, whatever they may be” (1887a, p. 2238). The pedagogical discipline should be categorized as a third sector of the scientific field — that of knowledge that helps to free man through the path of reason. Its chief objective is to show that all human life can be rationalized, and thus, *make the creation of a state of hyperconscience in each educated subject*.

The effort linked to the initial debate around the sciences of education assumed the possibility of, through them, constituting a morality independent from any religious or metaphysical fact. “The question”, Ferdinand Buisson pointed out, “is knowing whether it is possible to create a disposition in the child’s soul through a purely laic moral education, i.e. a moral that solely acquires its strength, prestige and authority through the moral idea itself; this is the conviction upon which the French Republic is grounded” (1911, pp. 1348-1349). The principles of the catechism of progressive science were now viewed as an effective device of social regulation. Henri Marion, in the program of his *Cours d’Instruction Morale pour les Écoles Normales Primaires*, made exhaustive lists of individual duties at

the start of the huge Moral Practice Section. Also, when he wanted to define the space of this terrain, he only allowed for what he called the “main forms of self-respect: individual virtues (moderation, prudence, courage, respect for the truth and the given word, personal dignity, etc.)” (Marion, 1882, p. 1768). Just one step separated that point from the affirmation, as Compayré stated (1885, p. 92), that education of the conscience is interconnected with education of all the faculties of the soul. The action should fortify the psychological reflection aimed at ensuring that the individual has the capacity for self-governing. There seemed to be no doubt that the formation of a moral spirit was, fundamentally, “a *technique*, the technique of human action in society” (Buisson, 1911, p. 1350).

The reason-responsibility conceptual pair is inscribed as the essence of this logic of development of a scientific reasoning of practical vocations (Nóvoa, 2002). At the basis of the moral conscience, we would find the first element. Reason was viewed as “the spirit itself, considered in its own constitution, its innate requirements, its universal and eternal needs” (Marion, 1887c, p. 2529). It responded as such to the need to find a common basis for all men, and at the same time, to define thinking and civilization as *natural* elements. Here the idea was established that the ethical commandments were realities, but realities that supposed a *clarified acceptance* of the citizens. Education was hence justified as the operation able to take children and the young and incorporate the social rules through the path of intelligence and rational knowledge. It was as if a commandment, in order to exist and grow in the spirits, had first to be known. For the pedagogues at the end of the 19th century, responsibility thus supposed “a moral education that had enlightened the conscience and developed the idea of good and duty”, a task of constant *mentalisation* of the obligatory laws. They established a direct association with the most important political concept of modernity, the concept of *freedom*. Responsibility supposed it entirely. The pedagogical discourse thus affirmed that the human condition was to submit oneself voluntarily to the commandments of law. “Responsibility”, pointed out Compayré, “can define the character of an intelligent and free self, who, in knowing what he does and being able to act

in way other than what is usual, must face the consequences of his own acts” (Compayré, 1882c, pp. 1855-1856). The pedagogical reflections aimed to associate, if not unify, what common sense would have led one to understand as corresponding to contradictory realities or paradoxical hypotheses.

The sociologist Durkheim also consecrated many pages of a doctrinal nature, justifying the fusion of opposites, starting invariably from the absolute value of scientific reason and the conscience of the moral. He insisted on the principle that any educational project, to present itself as modern, would have to translate *personal autonomy* into *mastering of the self*. Durkheim intended to justify the thesis that only *subjectivation* of the rules of the moral would provide a secure basis for a healthy social life. He therefore had to unify the great binary oppositions that any educational relation contains. Freedom and authority, constraint and consent, devotion and sacrifice, and reason and conscience were for him terrains that could not be separated under any circumstances. His long article “Éducation” closes with a paragraph that summarizes the whole power-knowledge program and the promotion of the regimes of self-government that the 20th century school would effectively make universal. I reproduce it in its entirety:

“We have sometime opposed freedom and authority as if these two factors of education contradicted and restricted each other. But this is a false opposition. In fact these two terms are far from being opposite, intertwining with each other. Freedom is the offspring of well-understood authority. To be free is not to do what one wants, it is to be the master of oneself, to act through reason and to do one’s duty. It is in fact exactly in bestowing the child with self-discipline that the authority of the teacher should be used. The teacher’s authority is nothing more than an aspect of authority of duty and of reason. The child has to be trained to recognize progressively the authority in the educator’s word; this is the condition that leads to a later discovery of authority in his own conscience and his own personal judgment” (Durkheim, 1911a, p. 536).

The notion of a modern educational relation establishes a causal connection between particularized knowledge of trends, habits, desires or emotions of pupils and the molding of their moral sensibilities. It was the attempt to make this socializing technology of a disciplinary character viable that was the genesis of the *discovery of the pupil* and his differentiated treatment from the last quarter of the 19th century onwards. If the individual personality had become the central element of the intellectual culture of the time, from politics to economics, even to art, it was also necessary that the educator begin to account for the germ of individuality that was within each child. Instead of treating the school population in a uniform and invariable form, the modern teacher should vary his methodologies “according to the individual temperaments and the evolution of each intelligence”, noted Durkheim in his other article “Pédagogie” (1911b, p. 1541).

It was child psychology that would respond to the need to ascertain the three faculties of the laic soul — “sensitivity”, “will” and “intelligence” — because it was obliged to acknowledge the diversity of individual characters. Henri Marion provides again an appropriate definition of the discipline: “psychology means science of the soul: the field of psychology changes according to the way one understands the soul and according to whether one accepts that there can be a scientific knowledge of it” (Marion, 1882, p. 1761).

The first faculty was the one given most importance and was even viewed as the common basis for all phenomena of the moral. It would be through *intelligence* that the educator should begin.

The faculty of intelligence was given priority as it was viewed as the common basis for all phenomena of the moral and it is this faculty that the educator should focus on first. The more the powers of intelligence are developed the more enlightened the perception of consciousness of duty becomes. In a well-organized intelligence, all the other segments of the soul would also have a defined position. The objective was to show that the intellectual work of the memory would strengthen individual identity: “each new fact of conscience is a new element of the

idea of the self” (Compayré, 1882b, p. 1555). Therefore the part of intelligence that would have as its object the child personality, would be worked on through school education through the strengthening of psychological reflection. This was the only way, indeed, able to ensure possession and government of the self. Therefore, the part of intelligence that would have as its object the child’s personality, would be worked on through the strengthening of psychological reflection, which was viewed as the only way to ensure government of the self. The psychopedagogical discourse claimed it possible to introduce a naturalist teaching methodology. All the logic on which school work was structured — the constant repetition of processes allied to a progression in learning through levels of growing complexity and abstraction — arose with the reproduction of the rules observable in nature itself, aiming also to enable the pupil to ‘find’ himself. As such, it was demonstrated that reason would be inscribed in the world of natural things. Compayré explained: “pedagogical action in the field of the faculties of the soul should come as close as possible to the order of nature; in this way an evolution is favored that leads from the concrete to the abstract, from instinctive life to reflective life; in this way the faculties of the soul gain their own activity, a dynamism and an energy that will allow them to increasingly develop by themselves throughout the life; therefore, school education can be succeeded in all ages by a personal education, by a self-education” (Compayré, 1882a, p. 986).

The faculty of *sensitivity* would be dealt with through identical processes to rational progression. It was explained, for example, that one could not demand that a student love his country without first informing him of its existence and its historical importance for life in society. But, in contrast to the previous faculty, here the problem was not only in developing and enlarging it. For highly noble feelings to take root it was supposed that opposing faculties be simultaneously regulated, monitored, moderated and contained, or even prohibited. While it was easy to celebrate the creative force of the imagination, patent in many cultural creations that school promoted, it was also imperative to stamp out the dangers, errors and pernicious illusions that were often hidden within the child. It was important that

the child understood that reason should prevail over the heart, that it was the unrestrained fantasies of the heart that could divert one from the path of truth. The world of impulse therefore became, in these terms, defined as purely fictional, while that of reason was identified entirely with the principle of reality. Hence, throughout the school cycle, as the years passed, first in the spirit of the child and then in the young adolescent, there would be a natural process of the passage of the lesser modalities from (i) “self-love”, presented as selfish, to another kind of inclination defined as (ii) “altruistic” — and illustrated with cases of patriotism and sacrifice for one’s neighbor or even for humanity. The process ended with the eruption of a (iii) “purely abstract love” for the values of truth, beauty and good. The major question of popular education would therefore be the gradual and consolidated *substitution of the sensation with the idea*. “The development of sensibility”, proclaimed Compayré, “is intimately linked to the progress of intelligence” (1885, p. 183). There was no virtue other than that which tended towards a love of virtue itself. The fancy of the ardent imagination of children and the young would be contained through forms of positive knowledge, judicious reflection and healthy examples.

The task to instill the moral became delicate rather than difficult when applied to the third faculty — the *will*. The school attempted, in another approximation to nature that will overcome desire. Desire was identified as a solicitation exterior to the subject, while will was assumed to be the result of free resolution. But even so, will could be structured against child spontaneity, given that this was where the distinctive and independent mark of each child resided, which had to be preserved. Elie Pécaut tackled this delicate problem head on. He had no hesitation in stating that “obedience is the first and indispensable condition of all education”. He even translated the educational relation into “spiritual constraint, moral domination, absolute empire — noble and sacred in its aims — of the science on ignorance, or, to sum up, of strength over weakness”. Moreover, this clear conscience about the orthopaedics of souls did not impede Pécaut from also dealing with the question of autonomy and free will. Pécaut carefully described the two educational paradigms present at the time.

The first, which he labelled theocratic, was based on the principle that all human nature was evil, and therefore a person could not be left to his own vices. Every combined effort, from instruction to education, from the moral to opinion, from custom to the reiterated use of force, had proved historically insufficient before the gigantic task of “reducing to absolute impotence the spontaneity of man — which is an error and a corruption — and thus *deprive man of self-government*, giving him up to unflinching hands, under the dignified stewardship of faith, and the power of those whose earthly authority comes from a divine origin” (Pécaut, 1887, pp. 2121-2123; my italics). The authoritarian spirit, grounded on ancient tradition, had looked for support for the civilizing task *outside the child*, and in so doing, was to be absolutely condemned. The error had been in not wanting to face the fact that nothing could save man apart from man himself. The second model — inspired by Rousseau and spawning from the Enlightenment and Progress — believing in the original goodness of human nature, attempted, on the contrary, to stimulate and strengthen all the instincts of independence and rights inherent to the realization of the person. This was the great promise. In fact, Pécaut considered that the most important cog in the civilizing task of humanization of the child was to count on the child itself. The crux was to achieve a consented and docile obedience that did not collide with the personal energy of each subject. Truth, justice, goodness, duty and sacrifice would be taught as corresponding to a law inscribed in the very conscience of the child.

THE DISCIPLINARY DEVICE DESIGNED BY MODERN PEDAGOGY

In taking on board the idealization of the child and the educational relation, disciplinary practices would undergo a complete mutation. The refusal of repressive modalities in the school context would be, however, the last measure tending to impose *as natural the civilising idea that an outside stimulus would correspond to a voluntary movement within*. Modern standardization arose, in fact, on the great idea of spontaneous discipline. Modern pedagogues came to agreement on this point: “the system that

best suits a child is that in which he learns self control” (Buisson, 1882a, p. 716). This principle can be translated into various maxims. First, and from the intellectual perspective, the pupil would be led to value study and reflect on himself. This led to constant appeals for personal, free and voluntary work. Second, with regard to the moral aspect, the old system, completely alien to the pupil, of material reward-corporal punishment, would be exchanged for strategies of direct responsibility: the pupils would comply with the several school cycles, hearing that experiences of good and evil and pain and joy would always be natural consequences of his individual acts. Each pupil would be taught that the only reward he could obtain would be the satisfaction of his most elevated inclinations. In truth, modern pedagogy would suggest that school guarantees that each individual would be able to win over himself upon completion of his studies.

It should also be noted that the authoritarian model was identified by these pedagogues as essentially linked to the regulatory formulas inspired directly from military discipline and criminal type logic. The punitive and compensatory prerogatives that the schoolmaster used, since Classic Antiquity, were applied largely to sanction or punish lack of knowledge. These only focused on *instruction* and not *education* of the pupil. In its absurd materiality, violence applied to the child began to be looked on by this progressive generation as artificial and without any value on conduct. The liberal dynamics of government of the self demanded, in the educational field, a much more complex set of practices that acted on the group of behavioral dispositions and not only on fear. But the determination to end corporal punishment and humiliation did not mean a restriction or economizing of means. On the contrary, it was a process of amplification and diversification, leading *discipline* as far as possible, i.e. exactly to the point when it was no longer necessary. Compayré confessed so clearly: “its aim, in any case, is to become needless” (1885, p. 457).

Discipline could not live without a careful and complete staging of the open spaces. The statement is extremely subtle and loaded with historical substance: “There is no other way to accustom the spirit to freedom than to imprison it in continuous and enforced sensations” (Compayré, 1885, p.

97). In these terms the new disciplinary apparatus aimed to create objective structures of behavior, but through a practical positioning that attended above all to the involuntary situation and the multi-directional movements in the various places where the action took place. This was the point on which the essential of the discourse of educational innovation became centered at the end of the 19th century. In the article “Education”, that he wrote for his *Dictionary*, (1882b, pp. 805-811), Buisson fully embraced this framework of *psi* origin. For Buisson, the faculties of the soul and the very freedom of the child were developed by the most powerful instrument that education had at its disposal, the *habitus*. Virtues and vices would be positions running through any spirit: will was, however, the exclusive offspring of habit. Buisson and his contemporaries argued that the effect of regularity, repetition and discipline, through pedagogical strategies such as duly staggered timetables in weekly cycles, would shape, over time, the whole *framework of existence*. The learning of the curricular content would run in parallel with the task of acquisition of moral values, whose everyday repetition would turn into voluntary energy. Conforming to duty would make one feel like a “perpetual and pleasing imprisonment” (Buisson, 1882b, p. 809). At the end of schooling, the habit of doing good would have become second nature. It would be identified with subjectivity itself (Carrau, 1880, p. 948).

It is no exaggeration to say that the *discovery* of the child in last the century derived directly from this project of power. Gaillard, also in the *Dictionnaire de pédagogie*, endeavored to show the advantages of a differentiated study of individual characters. It was not by chance that his article was titled “School Discipline”. After stating that the psychological science had proved that it was impossible for two soul mates to exist, Gaillard made knowledge depend on individual diversity of a panoptic vigilance of the pupil — in the classroom, in the playground, along the route that the child took home and why not inside the home — thus proving that, one by one and separately, *all the pupils could be governed*. His portrait should be read as a remote expression of the methods that would bring about the modern disciplinary practices, which leads to systematic and in-depth observation to remove the need to act directly on the bodies or the consciences.

“Pupils cannot all be treated in the same way. Some of them oppose our efforts with an indifference that seems insurmountable; others react with an exasperating indolence; for many it is a question of breaking their pride; some are crude and apathetic, and it is therefore necessary to stimulate them at all times in order to arouse their attention; the shy ones require encouragement, the active and impetuous ones should be calmed down all the time. Some are led on by their colleagues and don’t have any initiative, while others command and turn into little despots... The scope of the individual characters that teachers face is extremely wide, as is extremely high the number of proper procedures that they must employ to guide and try to modify their pupils. The personal characteristics will be better known if the pupils are observed, not only in the classroom, but also in the playgrounds and other spaces, given that, when free from all constraints, they show their true selves; The teacher will know them better as well through contacts made with their families. The teacher will accept the children as they truly are and will make a bigger effort to turn them into what they should be. All school discipline must train the pupils to win over themselves” (Gaillard, 1882, p. 719).

CONCLUSION

We know that the discourses around the moral problem and the corresponding creation of disciplinary technologies have accelerated significantly and become ever more complex in modernity. Pedagogy also wanted to translate this political program, while claiming for itself the status of positive science. The discursive formation drawn up from the last quarter of the 19th century gave us without doubt the idea that freedom would be the great accelerator of authority and discipline. The psychopedagogical considerations concerning the internal structure of the soul and the play of contrasts that would demarcate the child-youth passions, were nothing more than the transfer, to the educational field, of the interests and investments of governmentalized subjectivation. Indeed, for this group of first pedagogues it was already very clear that each singularity was becoming viewed as a point of passage directed towards principles and forces of power. A permanent striving would characterize modernity — to govern without governing through the amplification of power to its furthest limits (i.e., the choices of autonomous subjects in their decisions).

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