Articles

The formative role of the *Lógos* as argued speech

O papel formativo do *Lógos* enquanto palavra argumentada

Vicente Zatti[1]* , Marcos Sidnei Pagotto-Euzebio[2] , Bruno Drumond Mello Silva[3] ,
Claudio Almir Dalbosco[4]

[1]Instituto Federal de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia do Rio Grande do Sul (IFRS), Campus Canoas, Canoas, RS, Brasil
[2]Universidade de São Paulo (USP), São Paulo, SP, Brasil
[3]Centro Estadual de Educação Tecnológica Paula Souza, Igaratá, São Paulo, SP, Brasil
[4]Universidade de Passo Fundo (UPF), Passo Fundo, RS, Brasil

Abstract

This paper examines the formative role of *lógos*, understood as argued speech, by exploring the relationships between rationality, reasonableness, speech, and education. To this end, we conducted a theoretical review based on bibliographical research within the field of Philosophy of Education. We begin by defining education as a process of human formation—specifically, the development of beings capable of speaking and acting. The argument is structured in two parts: first, a reconstruction of the concept of *lógos* in Jürgen Habermas' thought; second, an investigation of its origins in Ancient Greek thought. We propose that, in both contexts, lógos can be understood as argued speech, and that its formative significance lies in its role in the humanization of individuals and the establishment of a shared political sphere.

Keywords: *lógos*; human formation; education through speech; *paideia*; Habermas.

Resumo

No presente artigo, tematizamos o papel formativo do *lógos*, definido como palavra argumentada, ao discutirmos as relações entre racionalidade, razoabilidade, palavra e educação. Para tal, realizamos uma revisão teórica, a partir de pesquisa bibliográfica, situada na área de filosofia da educação. Inicialmente, definimos a educação como processo de formação humana, de seres capazes de falar e agir, para, em seguida, estruturar o percurso argumentativo em duas partes: na primeira, tratamos da reconstrução do *lógos* no pensamento de Jürgen Habermas; na segunda, da origem do *lógos* no pensamento grego antigo. Defendemos que nos dois contextos, o *lógos* pode ser entendido como palavra argumentada, e sua importância formativa, se dá por meio de seu papel na humanização do humano e na elaboração de uma esfera política comum.

Palavras-chave: *lógos*; formação humana; educação pela palavra; *paideia*; Habermas.

INTRODUCTION

Although in recent times utilitarian and instrumental interests have increasingly gained ground and co-opted educational narratives — for instance, consider the concepts of human capital and competencies — in the long Western philosophical tradition, education is understood, above all, as a process of human formation. In this sense, formation means the constitution of the very humanity of the human being; it refers to the process through which the being whose birth is marked by incompleteness, or a condition of openness, becomes human[1]. Through education, or the possibility of human educability, we rise to a mode of being not given a priori in nature, but developed as culture throughout history.

---

[1] Severino (2006, p. 621) argues that, in Western culture, education has always been understood as a process of human formation. He also defines formation as the very humanization of the human being, "a process of becoming human as a humanizing becoming, through which the natural individual becomes a cultural being." On the other hand, for a more contemporary discussion of the idea of *formation* in the Anglo-Saxon context, see Andrea R. English (2013), and in the German context, Heiner Hastedt (2012).

We are, therefore, heirs to an intellectual tradition that conceives education not as means to achieve certain extrinsic goals, but rather to fulfill an intrinsic purpose — namely, human formation[2]. In this sense, if "the essence of education is natality, the fact that beings are born into the world" (Arendt, 2016, p. 222)[3], such an event is twofold. Biological birth marks entry into the world of the living, but beyond that, there is a second birth — the one that inserts the newborn into a world crafted as a human artifice. In the words of Rousseau (2014, p. 285): "We are born, so to speak, twice: once to exist, once to live." The essence of education pertains to this second birth, and its intrinsic purpose is the formation of the living beings born into the human world. Thus, the concept of formation becomes imperative whenever a child is born: from the fact of natality arises the educational demand, the constitution of the human as the critical insertion of the living being into a symbolic tradition developed, of course, in the form of language.

"By the word, man becomes man" (Fiori, 1983, p. 7)[4] is another way of saying that human formation occurs through a process of linguistic insertion into a symbolic tradition. Likewise, Gusdorf (2021, p. 49)[5] affirms: "It is through the word that man comes into the world and the world comes into thought." To clarify the meaning of such a proposition, Jürgen Habermas (1929–) developed an analysis of social evolution based on the concepts of labor and interaction, in a reconstruction of historical materialism. He argues that the reproduction of human life does not depend solely on labor, as Karl Marx (1818–1883) posited. Although material reproduction depends on labor, the reproduction of humanity primarily depends on linguistically mediated interaction. For Habermas, the reproduction of human life is founded primarily "on symbolically mediated interactions (in the sense of G. H. Mead) — by a system of social norms that presupposes language" (Habermas, 1983, p. 116–117). From the distinction between labor and interaction as conditions for the self-constitution and reproduction of humanity, Habermas identifies two types of interests related to two forms of social action: a technical interest, concerned with controlling and dominating nature; and a practical interest, which guides human action toward communicative understanding. Thus, human rationality comprises two dimensions: the instrumental and the communicative. Habermas links human formation to communicative rationality, insofar as these processes of interaction enable humanization by inserting the newborn into a symbolic tradition through language.

In this way, Habermas constructs a path toward the reconstruction of an expanded concept of rationality — a communicative *lógos* not restricted to the cognitive-instrumental dimension. For him, rationality is fundamentally communicative, operating not only through technique and science, but also symbolically structuring the lifeworld. While instrumental rationality is related to knowledge and efficient means to achieve ends, communicative rationality is related to human interaction, to speaking and acting: "for rationality has less to do with the possession of knowledge than with the manner in which speaking and acting subjects acquire and employ knowledge" (Habermas, 2012, p. 31).

Education as a process of human formation presupposes a broadened form of learning, related to the operationalization of this procedural *lógos*, which is not a technical tool but the foundation of human speech and action. The intrinsic goal of education, since the beginnings of our tradition, we reaffirm, is the formation of a human being capable of speaking and acting. Thus, the learning of useful knowledge, though important for material reproduction, is of secondary relevance; primary importance lies in the exercise of rationality in its broad sense, as communicative *lógos*. *Lógos* is reason as the ability to "think and speak in an orderly way, with measure and proportion, with clarity and in a way understandable to others" (Chauí, 2003, p. 62). That is, it is rationality as public discursive capacity — reasoned speech, shared and publicly validated. *Lógos* refers to an ancient Greek intellectual elaboration, expressed in the inseparable link between thinking and speaking (Cassin, 2005), which constitutes human knowledge (Colli, 1992).

---

[2] For further discussion on the concept of education as human formation, see Zatti and Pagotto-Euzebio (2022).
[3] Hannah Arendt (1906–1975), in her work *Between Past and Future*, presents natality as the birth into the properly human world. Beyond the biological birth we share with other animals, it is through education that we are born into the world of culture.
[4] Ernani Maria Fiori (1914–1985) wrote *Learning to Speak One's Word* as a preface to Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in which he explores the relationship between speech, education, and human formation.
[5] Georges Gusdorf (1912–2000), in *La Parole*, presents the word as the decisive element in humanization—as the threshold between the human being and the animal.

Rev. Ibero-Am. Estud. Educ., 20, e19186, 2025

2/12

In Habermas, we find a reception of this core idea from ancient thought in the concept he coined: communicative reason. His reconstruction connects possible rationality to the affirmation of truth through reasonable acceptability: the justification of validity comes through the non-coercive force of the better argument. In this sense, we understand that in Habermas, *lógos* retains the meaning of reasoned speech, characterizing the link between the concept of communicative rationality and the *lógos* of ancient Greece. This connection is explicitly stated by Habermas (2012) in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, where he presents communicative rationality as a reconstruction in favor of an expanded concept of reason, which harkens back to the Greek understanding of *lógos*. In this masterwork, Habermas also resumes and expands the distinction between labor and interaction that had still dominated, to a certain extent, his theory of cognitive interests presented in *Knowledge and Human Interests*[6].

In the next section of our article, we aim to demonstrate the role of *lógos* as reasoned speech in human formation. To this end, we have structured the text in two parts. In the first, we present Habermas's concept of rationality as a communicative reconstruction in favor of Greek *lógos*, linking this rationality to the concepts of reasoned speech and human formation. In the second, we turn to the concept of *lógos* in ancient Greek thought to analyze its relationship with education (*paideia*) aimed at forming men capable of speaking and acting. Through this approach, we intend to affirm the central importance — both in Habermas and in ancient Greek thought — of the exercise of *lógos* for human formation.

HABERMASIAN RECONSTRUCTION OF RATIONALITY AS COMMUNICATIVE *LÓGOS*

Habermas (2012) begins the work *The Theory of Communicative Action* by recognizing reason as the central theme of philosophy. He relates the origin of philosophy to the reflexivity of reason embodied in knowing, speaking, and acting. In *Technology and Science as Ideology*, he diagnoses, from modernity onward, processes of rationalization in which rational decision-making is governed by goal-oriented action, in which "rationality as such is not established, but in the name of rationality, a particular form of hidden political domination" (Habermas, 2009, p. 46). In these cases, the rational form of technique and science advances instrumental rationality over the entirety of the lifeworld[7]. Thus, rationality loses its reflexivity: the cognitive-instrumental element, proper to knowing, also begins to operate in the fields of speaking and acting. Opposing this reductionism of reason to instrumental rationality, Habermas performs a des-transcendentalized reconstruction in favor of "older notions of *lógos*" (Habermas, 2012, p. 35), in which he develops the concept of communicative reason.

While in instrumental action, rational is the action that satisfies the necessary conditions to successfully intervene in the world, in communicative action, rational is the assertion by which the speaker satisfies the necessary condition to achieve an illocutionary end — mutual understanding about something in the world (Habermas, 2012). In other words, in the expanded understanding of reason as communicative reason, rationality is understood "as a disposition of subjects capable of speaking and acting" (Habermas, 2012, p. 56). As a disposition of subjects capable of speech and action, rationalizing cannot be reduced to the elaboration of efficient means to achieve desired ends but rather to the cancellation of coercive relations that systematically distort communication and prevent consensual conflict regulation (Habermas, 1983). Rationalizing here means overcoming distorted communicative relations so that the only authority that prevails is that of the best argument, the one accepted based on intersubjectively validated reasons. In other words, for Habermas (2002a, p. 102), "To be rational is to be compelled to be coerced by these norms, subject to the authority of reasons." The normativity of language serves as a path to discursive practice, in which participants justify their assertions rationally toward recognizing the best arguments as valid. Communicative rationality is inherent to everyday communicative practice, related to understanding among speakers, anchored in a series of pragmatic assumptions that play a normative role. These

---

[6] It is worth noting the commemorative collection marking the 30th anniversary of *Knowledge and Human Interests*, organized by Stefan Müller-Doohm (2000), which includes several critical essays highlighting the limitations of that work and how *The Theory of Communicative Action* represents an attempt to overcome them.

[7] For a more in-depth discussion on the rational form of science and technology, their limits, and their attempts to colonize the lifeworld, see Zatti (2016).

intersubjectively shared pragmatic assumptions, as conditions for understanding, establish, as a kind of rational duty, the horizon of the best argument.

When individuals communicate through speech acts, they must necessarily rely on a consensus that serves as a background, explicitly recognized by mutual recognition of universal validity claims (intelligibility, truth, correctness, and sincerity) (Habermas, 1997). These are pragmatic presuppositions: anyone wishing to participate in a process of understanding cannot fail to ensure them. Through speech acts, speakers raise validity claims, which depend on intersubjective recognition (Habermas, 2002b). Intersubjective recognition of the claim guarantees its universal character and defines its rational acceptability. Truth becomes related to rational acceptability: true is the statement whose validity claim of the speech act is justified by its rational motivation. Whenever a validity claim in communicative action becomes problematic, it must be thematized within discourse to be redefined and reestablish the background consensus. Discourse is the form of communication characterized by argumentation. Discourses "are rational organizations through which we try to ground problematic claims of truth and correctness" (Siebeneichler, 1989, p. 98). Discourse establishes the possibility of overcoming distorted communication as it can redefine validity claims by justifying them with arguments.

Habermas (2012) defines argumentation as the type of discourse by which communication participants can thematize controversial validity claims and resolve them based on arguments. Argumentation, therefore, is the reflexive form of communicative action. An argument concerns the capacity to rationally justify validity claims in order to convince or not the discourse participants to assent to the respective validity claim. This process of verifying validity claims through discourse has an intersubjective character since the universal presuppositions from which the validity of speech acts can be justified do not pertain to a transcendental subject but to the intersubjective consensus serving as the background in a community of speakers[8].

Through argumentation, we indicate our claims, subject them to criticism, and, when refuted, we may correct them in the face of failure. Thus, rationality is related by Habermas (2012) to the capacity to learn from failures. Therefore, "learning processes depend on argumentations" (Habermas, 2012, p. 57). For argumentation to play the role assigned by Habermas—related both to learning and overcoming distorted forms of communication—it is necessary to presuppose the exclusion of all coercion except that of the best argument, which is a communicative presupposition: "Participants in an argumentation must generally presuppose that the structure of their communication [...] excludes all coercion [...] except coercion of the best argument" (Habermas, 2012, p. 61). The best argument is that recognized intersubjectively as such by its rational justification; in other words, it is the argument that can be rationally accepted. Hence, rational motivation is the defining criterion of the best argument; only it can be accepted as the outcome of discursive action, since it constitutes a "non-coercive coercion." Only under the presupposition of a coercion-free communicative community, where the use of speech is symmetrically distributed, understanding based on the nonviolent resource of the best argument is possible.

Argumentation is presented by Habermas (2012) as a discursive procedure through which one seeks to convince a universal audience and obtain general agreement or a rationally motivated consensus on the validity of the presumptive claims in the argument. The capacity to convince concerning the best arguments is founded on rational acceptability, the rationally motivated agreement. Habermas (2002a) presents four pragmatic presuppositions as necessary for discourse to constitute argumentation: 1) publicity and inclusion; 2) equal communicative rights; 3) exclusion of errors and illusions; 4) non-coercion. They constitute an "ideal speech situation" and enable an egalitarian universalism whose procedural aspect is also related to learning, as it allows constant re-elaboration according to more universalistic intersubjective perspectives. In this sense, argumentation refers to the operation of rationality in a broad sense as communicative *lógos*.

---

[8] The effort to carry out a pragmatic-universal transformation of Kantian transcendental philosophy constituted an indispensable philosophical propaedeutic for the development of the *Theory of Communicative Action*. On this, see Thomas McCarthy (1980).

Rev. Ibero-Am. Estud. Educ., 20, e19186, 2025

4/12

Habermas' communicative reconstruction of rationality rehabilitates the modern emancipatory ideal, particularly that of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). At the same time, it seeks to overcome the logocentrism of the Kantian subject and revive the emancipatory promises of his Enlightenment thought. This continuity, even if partial, of Kantian ideals in Habermas seems clear if we consider the concept of public use of reason. In the article *Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?*, Kant presents enlightenment as the emergence from immaturity, defined as the incapacity to make use of understanding without another individual's tutelage. Such enlightenment becomes possible if people have freedom to make public use of reason on all matters. Public use of reason is that made by anyone before the "great public of the learned world" (Kant, 2005, p. 65). This use, in which an individual places himself as a rational being before a universal audience to freely expose his arguments, is key to enlightenment. The *Gelehrter* (scholar) is taken by Kant as the model of the rational individual capable of making independent public use of reason. Here lies a very clear connection, at least as an ideal, between Kant's public use of reason and Habermas' argumentation understood as a discursive procedure, since with it the communicative subject also faces a universal audience and must convince it argumentatively. Thus, through the concept of public use of reason, Kant foresees an argumentative element of rationality, which Habermas redefines in terms of communicative reason.

The reconstruction of rationality as communicative reason also revitalizes the ideal of human formation, as Habermas relates it to communicative rationality. The reproduction of humanity is primarily symbolic reproduction of the structures of the lifeworld, genuinely constituted by communicative rationality. While instrumental rationality is necessary for the material reproduction of society, communicative rationality is necessary for the symbolic reproduction of humanity. Socially, while instrumental rationality is embodied in the system, communicative rationality is rooted in the lifeworld. Thus, society is understood complementarily as system and symbolically structured lifeworld[9].

The system refers to societal structures related to material and institutional reproduction of society through the economy and the state (Freitag, 2005), which develop the mechanisms of money and power. The system operates with instrumental rationality, succeeding insofar as means are efficiently articulated to achieve ends; therefore, the system concerns utilitarian operation. The lifeworld is the horizon of communicative action, operated by communicative rationality, succeeding insofar as understanding is constituted. "The lifeworld is something we all have always present intuitively and unproblematically as a pre-theoretical totality, not objective — as the sphere of everyday self-evidences, common sense" (Habermas, 2002b, p. 48). The lifeworld is constituted by language and culture and forms a nearly transcendental background in which everyday communicative praxis and understanding processes take place. Its nearly transcendental character refers to its being an inescapable human condition, in which we have always found ourselves. It is constitutive of understanding because it is from the common lifeworld that speakers and listeners manage to understand something (Habermas, 2002b). Because it aims at understanding, it is the typical space of communicative reason where symbolic reproduction of human life occurs. Education, understood as human formation, is linked to the lifeworld and, as such, depends on the existence of a lifeworld not colonized by instrumental rationality, where communicative rationality can flourish free from external coercions. In other words, education depends on a lifeworld not distorted by systemic interests—this is a condition for the exercise of *lógos* as argued speech, in which the rational acceptability of the best arguments serves as the criterion for the validity of speech and action. On the other hand, when such a world does not exist, communicatively oriented education itself can open spaces for it to begin to emerge. Therefore, it can be said that, in a certain sense, there is a productive circularity between communicative education and the lifeworld.

If we focus specifically on school education, we must recognize that the school belongs to both spheres: the system and the lifeworld. As part of the state apparatus, linked to the institutional and material reproduction of society, the school is situated within the system. But insofar as it participates in education proper, the school is a space-time of formation,

---

[9] For a focused critique of Habermas's dualism of lifeworld and system, which we cannot develop here, see the thought-provoking essay by Hans Joas (2002).

Rev. Ibero-Am. Estud. Educ., 20, e19186, 2025

5/12

fundamentally related to the lifeworld and, therefore, to the space of possible communication among its participants. Hence the need for the school not to be reduced to a series of mechanisms and techniques. Far from being a mere instrument to meet external demands, the school—understood as a formative space-time—constitutes a vital space whose aim is mutual understanding. Orientation toward understanding, as typical of lifeworld interactions, presupposes relationships that are not instrumentalized, not coerced—that is, relationships that are free. Conceived in this way, the school is a public space governed by communicative rationality, where learners may find the freedom to exercise *lógos* as argued speech. When considered a free public space, in which participants in communication are free from communicative distortions, the school constitutes a kind of communicative community. Its formative value lies in teaching how to guide speech and action nonviolently, always seeking to affirm claims through the validation power of the best arguments. This underscores the importance of institutions such as schools, which can constitute themselves as free public spaces that foster learning in the perspective of communicative rationality, where the justification of speech and action rests on the nonviolent force of *lógos* as argued discourse. The existence of democratic, pluralistic, tolerant, and nonviolent societies depends on this broad formation shaped by communicative *lógos*.

By relating social evolution not only to instrumental rationality but primarily to communicative rationality, Habermas links learning to a form of *lógos* whose criterion of validity is the non-coercive force of the better argument—that is, the rational acceptability of an argument within a community of speakers. Education, as a broad process of formation and humanization, presupposes learning oriented by the operation of this communicative *lógos*, which grounds human speech and action. The formative process aims at strengthening the reflective form of communicative action—discursive rationality or discourse—as a path to forming a rational and autonomous subject. However, in this perspective, autonomy is tied to participation in discursive processes, no longer to the monological subject that prevails in modern rationality. Autonomy is linked to the capacity of the speaker, as participant in a communicative community, to affirm the rational validity of arguments—that is, it has an inherently intersubjective character.

Habermas sees in argumentation the path for eliminating distortions, making corrections, and developing more general and inclusive perspectives. He thus ties learning, as well as the social evolution that results from it, to argumentative processes. Formation is presented as a continually elevated process, made possible within the discursive horizon, in which intersubjective relations lead us toward increasingly universalizable levels of understanding. "To the extent that knowledge is justified by a learning process that overcomes old errors but does not protect us from new ones, each current state of knowledge remains relative to the best possible epistemic situation." (Habermas, 2004, p. 52). In this process of universalization, Kant's transcendental subject is replaced by the communicative community. Within the horizon of the communicative community, the claims embedded in speech acts are consensually validated through argumentation, in accordance with a rational intersubjective perspective that enables learning to make such claims increasingly universal and inclusive. In this way, Habermas opens a wide path for rethinking human formation—not centered on the figure of a monological subject, but rather as a communicative process among subjects seeking understanding through the public use of language.

In short, from Habermas's perspective, the learning fostered by discursive procedures enables us to deal with problematic situations in a nonviolent way, and argued speech becomes the path for recognizing the validity of claims supported by the force of the better argument. This highlights the importance of institutions that guarantee formative public spaces in which interactions can take place as exercises of *lógos* embodied in argued speech.

LÓGOS AND HUMAN FORMATION IN ANCIENT GREECE

After analyzing Habermas' thought and, based on it, establishing the relationships between rationality, argued speech, and human formation, we will situate the issue within ancient Greek thought—a reference point toward which the German philosopher seeks to reconstruct *lógos*. For this purpose, we will provide a brief overview of the development of the notion of

Rev. Ibero-Am. Estud. Educ., 20, e19186, 2025

6/12

lógos in the context of the *polis*, indicating how it gradually assumed centrality in the domain of public debate and, consequently, in the horizon of human formation, drawing examples from poetic tradition, the philosophy of Heraclitus of Ephesus, and the general character of the Sophistic movement. More emphatically, we will focus on examining the perspectives developed by Isocrates, and by Socrates and Plato, given the importance of these authors' legacy for Western thought and educational debate. It is Isocrates who first grounds *paideia* in the excellence of speech, conferring on *lógos* a humanizing role that establishes a connection with Habermas' conception of *lógos*, which we understand needs to be thematized. Socrates and, especially, Plato are those who consolidate the classical concepts of *paideia* and *lógos*, with which Habermas' reconstruction dialogues.

Historically, it is important to highlight: the term *lógos* did not always carry the rational connotation that philosophy would later attribute to it. Between the 8th and 6th centuries BCE, during the so-called Archaic period—when, according to mid-20th-century French Hellenists, the "secularization of speech" was already underway—"*lógos* and *mythos* are interchangeable actors" (Detienne, 1998, p. 94), continuing to compete for a conceptual space until philosophy appropriated and defined it in terms of an ordered and ordering reason (Detienne, 1991). In this context, Heraclitus' thought (540–470 BCE) shows the most evident exaltation of *logos*, understood as a kind of intelligence (*phronesis*, *nous*) that permeates everything (frags. 1, 2, and 113)[10], inhabits the human soul (frags. 45 and 115), can reveal the invisible harmony of all nature (frags. 54 and 123), and points to what is wise (frag. 50). Supported by this *logos*, Heraclitus accuses Homer and Hesiod—Greece's educators—for their lack of intelligence (*nous* — frags. 40, 42, 56, and 57), and men in general for wrongly judging what is just and unjust (frag. 102), exhorting them to speak intelligently and strengthen laws (frag. 114), since "thinking sensibly is the greatest virtue, and wisdom is to state what is true" (frag. 112). Here, prudence or sound judgment (*phronesis*) accompanies truth (*aletheia*): a spirit of subtlety rather than a geometric spirit, which we will become accustomed to later, marks the rationality of the wise.

Heraclitus was able to accurately list the central elements of the debate around *lógos*, especially the importance of the *polis* and the institution of popular participation in the assembly and courts from the late 6th century BCE (Aristotle, Constitution of Athens, 43.1-6). As Vernant rightly noted, the establishment of *isonomia* (equality of citizens before the law) fostered the emergence of a culture in which public debate, argumentative skill, and persuasive capacity became fundamental instruments of political action: "the *polis* system is primarily an extraordinary preeminence of speech over all other instruments of power" (Vernant, 2002, p. 53). This aspect did not escape the ancients, and Thucydides, proclaiming Athens as "the School of Greece," praised the *polis* where men use deliberation and knowledge instead of violence to govern the city (Thucydides, II, 40, 41). Therefore, it is in the secular space of the assembly and the free exercise of *lógos*—as "word, discourse"—that *lógos* as "reason" finds its developmental environment, marking the interdependent and reciprocal relation between *lógos* and politics: political virtue depends on *lógos*, and the development of *lógos* depends on the political space for public discussion (Colli, 1992).

The term "virtue," here translating the notion of *areté*, implies a broad conception of "excellence" initially linked to hereditary privileges, noble family belonging, and divine favors. The ability to speak well, decide justly, and persuade through words has always been identified with the virtuous individual and admired as a divine gift (Hesiod, Theogony, vv. 81-93). However, already in the Archaic period, these qualities began to be conceived as the product of *paideia*, i.e., a formative process aiming to make man what he ought to be, as seen in Homer's depiction of Phoenix, who declares he taught Achilles "how to be an orator of speeches and doer of deeds" (Iliad, IX, 443). Later, within the democratic *polis* horizon, the conception of political virtue as a discursive skill resulting from *paideia* placed the educational question at the centre of intellectual concerns, since *paideia* had the task of forming the virtuous man capable of speaking and acting in the city by developing *lógos*: "originally, it becomes aware of itself, its rules, and its efficacy through its political function" (Vernant, 2002, p. 54).

When the *polis* institutes the distinction between matters of common public interest and private interest, it establishes a series of knowledges considered elements of a common

---

[10] The fragments of Heraclitus are cited from the edition by Kirk and Raven (1975).

Rev. Ibero-Am. Estud. Educ., 20, e19186, 2025

7/12

culture—knowledges that circumscribe an *ethos* and a *praxis*, quickly becoming the object of that deliberative *lógos* arising from public assemblies. Analogous to the dynamics of political debate, virtue begins to be conceived as something whose determination is, to some extent, subject to collective judgment. Thus, it is *lógos*, as a public discursive practice, that establishes and enables city life, guaranteeing and shaping the democratic dimension necessary for its functioning. The determination of political legality (*nomos*) as the result of a deliberative *lógos* whose aim is persuasion and the production of general consent corresponds to the very institution of political space and the search for criteria legitimizing political virtue (Cassin, 2005).

The democratic assembly symbolizes the environment from which the relationship between *lógos* and *polis* consciously raises the pedagogical issue—that is, the debate about the role of *paideia* in forming the virtuous citizen. Virtue, detached from the sacred aspect, is no longer identified with the values of the archaic agrarian-military aristocracy and comes to be considered knowledge—or a kind of knowledge—that can be learned through education, via teachings and practices. The virtuous man, in turn, is one who devotes his leisure time (*skholé*) to this education, through which he would be capable of realizing within himself the political ideal of human formation (Jaeger, 2003). Therefore, *paideia* is not conceived as mere instruction or technical training, but as "spiritual formation" (Jaeger, 2003, p. 343), implying—as Plato paradigmatically showed in *The Republic*—education of all human capacities, not only cognitive but also ethical and aesthetic. Here, without doubt, lie the original ideas of the two main subsequent educational projects: Latin *humanitas* and German *Bildung*.

Within the context of Athenian democracy, as eloquence and mastery of speech become decisive in establishing political deliberations in assemblies, virtue becomes identified especially with the capacity to win debates and persuade through *lógos* (Jaeger, 2003), clearly marking the shift in the conception of *areté* in favor of the educational task. It is in this scenario that the Sophists emerge as the first masters of political virtue, proclaiming themselves capable of educating men to speak well (Platão, Gorgias, 449e), making them fit to convince judges, rulers, and common men (Platão, Gorgias, 452d-e), and to "refute any proposition, whether true or false, indiscriminately" (Platão, Euthydemus, 272a). Assuming a radical epistemological relativism, the Sophists were characterized by a deeply eristic posture and the use of a variety of discursive resources to win debates, showing little or no concern for any conception of truth not subsumed under the criterion of persuasive effectiveness (Kerferd, 2003). For the Sophists, political virtue manifested in *lógos* capable of moving and persuading a large crowd due to the skill with which it was composed, "not by the truth of its claims" (Kerferd, 2003, p. 138); emptied of any ontological pretension, any essential link to the things it refers to, *lógos* itself becomes a producer of reality (Guthrie, 1977). This is broadly the conception of *lógos* found in the writings of Gorgias of Leontini (485–380 BCE), and from which the purpose of the *paideia* he offered is delineated.

Isocrates (436–388 BCE), whose place in the history of thought remains a matter of dispute—seen by some as a genuine sophist, by others as someone who surpasses sophistry—also takes mastery of speech as the aim of education. However, unlike the eristic sophists, he does not regard discourse merely as a tool for success (Marrou, 1990). Understanding the world of culture and values as a creation of the human spirit through *lógos*, Isocrates grounds *paideia* in the excellence of speech, which enables and fosters the development of civilization and culture (Marrou, 1990). Language, as *lógos*, lifts us from the world of nature (*phýsis*) into the world of values (*éthos*); that is, the universe of culture is only possible by virtue of *lógos*. And thanks to the creative power of *lógos*, human beings come together to build cities, establish laws, set values, conduct business, and pursue inquiry (Isokrates, *Antidosis*, 254). In this sense, for Isocrates, political virtue manifests as something more attuned to the conventions and pragmatic demands of human life—unlike Plato, for whom the foundation of virtue must be established transcendentally, in the realm of the intelligible world.

Contrasting Isocrates' thought with Plato's philosophy clearly reveals the particularity of the former: whereas Plato posits the existence of *epistēmē*—a form of knowledge capable of establishing definitive truth beyond the contradictions of mere opinion—and makes it the goal of *paideia*, Isocrates denies the existence of Truth with a capital "T", since the human world is the world of *lógos*, a world composed of opinions (*doxai*) and grounded in agreements and conventions. In this respect, like the sophists, Isocrates rejects an essentialist ontology, but

without embracing the radical relativism that characterized them. If there is no *epistēmē*, then the aim of education must be the development of *lógos* oriented toward the most reasonable, appropriate, and just opinions in each circumstance. As Isocrates himself puts it: "I can only consider wise those men who, through opinion, are able in most cases to discern what is best" (*Antidosis*, 271).

Isocrates' understanding of *lógos* as belonging to the domain of *doxa*, rather than *epistēmē*, leads him to formulate a conception of *doxa* that is fundamentally opposed to Plato's. For Isocrates, *doxa* does not refer to occasional, unreflective, or opportunistic opinion—ontologically inferior to *epistēmē*—but rather to a form of wisdom acquired through experience, capable of being communicated to others through lessons, examples, exhortations, and advice. Conceived in this way, as the cultivation of *lógos*, *paideia* in Isocrates takes the form of a general formation based on a broad and encompassing cultural repertoire, allowing those who follow this path to transform their inner selves, improve themselves, and elevate their spirit (Barros, 1976). In this sense, the central importance of *lógos* is evident, understood as a discursive, argumentative, and deliberative capacity aimed at building consensus around reasonable opinions that sustain political life. "This type of education does not consist in the accumulation of mere technical knowledge of any sort, but in the cultivation of the forces that hold the human community together" (Jaeger, 2003, p. 1194-1195).

The question of the formation of *lógos* as a means for establishing the just ordering of the *polis* is elaborated extensively and in detail in Socratic-Platonic philosophy. Here, we can offer no more than a few general remarks. In this regard, the major impact of Socratic thought lies in establishing the interiority of *lógos* in the soul—a soul that must turn toward itself and examine itself, echoing the Delphic inscription "know thyself," found in *First Alcibiades* (124b)—in the search for the true knowledge of virtue. Socrates rejects the sophistic *lógos*, motivated merely by the desire to win debates (Platão, *Gorgias*, 457d), and replaces it with the form of dialectical dialogue: that is, with a *lógos* that takes as its task the investigation and acquisition of true knowledge capable of overcoming the contradictions of mere and diverse human opinions (Guthrie, 1977), through a method that promotes "not only the logical correctness of arguments, but also the consensus of the interlocutors" (Casertano, 2018, p. 171). *Lógos*, as constitutive of the human soul, thus appears as that "capacity for discovery" which allows one "to distinguish good from evil, infallibly choosing the good" (Cornford, 2001, p. 46).

However, to reach this point, the soul must free itself from the false beliefs it has previously acquired; that is, it must reflect, analyze, and reassess its own opinions. This is the primary meaning of Socratic dialectic: through dialectical *lógos*, to lead interlocutors to the recognition of their own ignorance and "to the necessity of undertaking, by themselves, the search for knowledge" (Dorion, 2011, p. 45). As Cornford (2001) rightly observed, Socrates subverts both sophistic *paideia* and traditional education, replacing a "rationality of means" with a "teleological reason" that takes upon itself the task of determining and pursuing the ultimate aim of human life: the perfection of the soul (Platão, *Apology of Socrates*, 29d). As we know, Socrates' practice of dialectic did not bring him an auspicious end; tried and sentenced to death in 399 BCE for what was, fundamentally, a crime of opinion, his biography clearly reveals the delicate relationship between the democratic *polis* and freedom of thought and expression (Canfora, 2015).

Indeed, the shock of Socrates' death was decisive in the development of Plato's philosophy, in which we find the most complete expression of a worldview that connects *logos* and *polis*—but one that, for the first time, makes the educational problem (the formation of *lógos*) a political task. In other words, for Plato, the realization of political *aretē* depends on the formation of each individual's soul, and taking responsibility for this formation must be the primary function of the *polis* (Jaeger, 2003). Thus, in *The Republic*—the dialogue in which Plato investigates the constitution of a supremely just city—his central concern lies with the education of the "philosopher-king," the one who, having completed the full formative journey, has turned the soul's gaze toward Truth and therefore acquired the *epistēmē* necessary to govern justly. What was previously the Socratic ideal of self-knowledge and individual autonomy becomes, in Plato's thought, the only true political ideal: the construction of a liberating *paideia*, capable of leading human beings to virtue and happiness (Cornford, 2001).

The most symbolic expression of this Platonic ideal is found in Book VII of *The Republic* (514a–517b), in the famous "Allegory of the Cave," where Plato describes the soul's ascent through education. Broadly speaking, the allegory narrates the journey of a prisoner who knows the world only through the shadows projected by the light of a fire on the cave wall. Once freed, he gradually moves toward the exit, until he can behold, outside the cave, the "real world." The *eikones* (images) seen at the back of the cave represent unfounded opinions, a world dominated by uncertainty, while the "outside" symbolizes true knowledge (*epistēmē*), what later came to be known as the World of Ideas or Forms. Through the allegory, Plato seeks to illustrate the different ontological levels to which each kind of knowledge corresponds: images and opinions belong to the *sensible world*, while *epistēmē* and *noēsis* pertain to the *intelligible world* (Casertano, 2019). *Lógos* thus appears as the faculty through which human beings can free themselves from the chains of opinion, ascending—by means of a well-structured educational curriculum—to the kind of freedom that only true knowledge can provide. In this sense, Spinelli (2017) argues that, although Plato grounds *lógos* in the intelligible realm, at no point in the dialogue does Socrates (Plato's spokesperson) present himself to his interlocutor as one who possesses absolute knowledge. He does not pose as a sage, but as a lover of wisdom—a genuine philosopher. His *lógos* has less to do with a ready-made knowledge to be transmitted than with awakening the exercise of reason as a productive and legitimizing force of knowledge. That is, the *paideia* proposed by Socratic-Platonic thought aims to "foster an ongoing education in the exercise of rational potential" (Spinelli, 2017, p. 444), in light of the need to establish a shared sphere of coexistence—a genuine political life—founded on Truth, even if, ultimately, such knowledge can never be fully possessed by anyone, but must instead be continually pursued by the rational soul converted to philosophy.

At the pinnacle of the *paideia* he envisions, it is significant that Plato reserves the highest place for the science of dialectic (*Republic*, 534e–535a). This is no longer merely the dialogical method employed by Socrates, but a science that takes shape simultaneously as abstract, rational, and discursive thought (Colli, 1992); a science that is, at once, the method that enables one to "reach the goal of all learning" (Casertano, 2018, p. 175). In the context of the Socratic dialogue, it was sufficient for Socrates to establish propositions whose truth was intersubjectively accepted by himself and his interlocutors. As Gusdorf (2021) aptly noted, this already reveals—however rudimentary—a claim to universal validity as a criterion of truth. Platonic dialectic, in contrast, elevated to the status of science, enables the discovery of universal knowledge that encompasses truths superior to those sought in isolated propositions. It thus replaces mutual agreement with the requirement of a demonstrative procedure that discloses the truth of knowledge. In this way, Socratic-Platonic philosophy assigns to the exercise of *lógos*—both as rational capacity and as reasoned speech—the task of forming souls capable of contemplating intelligible, universal, and necessary truth, upon which the common world must be founded if there is to be justice in the *polis*.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The analysis of the issue of *lógos* in Habermas and in ancient Greek thought led us to characterize its formative role throughout the article based on two central axes: the first related to the symbolic reproduction of humanity or the humanization of the human being, and the second related to the elaboration of a common political sphere.

Habermas, with his communicative reconstruction of *lógos*, connects the symbolic reproduction of humanity not with the strategic-instrumental elements of rationality, but rather with its reflexive element, referring to the disposition of subjects capable of speaking and acting. For this reason, he advocates for the preservation of the lifeworld as a space not colonized by systemic rationality, in which he envisions a broad sense of learning through argumentative processes. Humanization not distorted by violent interests of domination depends on the preservation of the lifeworld as a sphere governed by communicative *lógos*, whose aim is understanding. Such a humanizing role of *lógos* was already present in ancient Greek thought, perhaps with greater emphasis in Isocrates, for whom the human world is erected from the word. Thus, we identify a convergence between Habermas and the ancient Greeks, whereby the formation made possible in the educational process should aim at strengthening discursive

Rev. Ibero-Am. Estud. Educ., 20, e19186, 2025

10/12

rationality, *lógos* as argued word. The recognition of the non-coercive force of the best arguments as a criterion of action, instead of violent coercive force, depends on a formative process through the exercise of *lógos*, and establishes an inextricable intertwining between word, education, and the humanization of the human being.

The reciprocity and interdependence between *lógos* and the political in the ancient Greek world indicate that the existence of a common public space depends on the possibility of addressing our dissensions through argued speech, and not through violent force. This underscores the political importance of education through the word: before *lógos*, we are all equal, and the persuasive force of discourse, established by its rational acceptability, makes possible the elaboration of a common political sphere. Therefore, our democracy also depends on the formation enabled by the exercise of *lógos* as argued word.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

REFERENCES

ARENDT, H. **Entre o passado e o futuro**. Tradução Mauro Barbosa. 8. ed. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2016.

ARISTOTLE. **The Athenian Constitution**. Translation H. Rackman. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952.

BARROS, R. S. M. Isócrates e a Filosofia. **Revista da Faculdade de Educação da USP**, São Paulo, v. 2, n. 1, p. 9-27, 1976. Disponível em: https://www.revistas.usp.br/rfe/article/view/33213. Acesso em: 02 ago. 2021.

CANFORA, L. **O mundo de Atenas**. Tradução Federico Carotti. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2015.

CASERTANO, G. Dialética. *In*: CORNELLI, G. *et al.* (ed.). **Platão**. São Paulo: Paulus, 2018. p. 169-188.

CASERTANO, G. **Uma introdução à *República* de Platão**. Tradução Maria da Graça G. de Pina. São Paulo: Paulus, 2019.

CASSIN, B. **O efeito sofístico:** sofística, filosofia, retórica, literatura. São Paulo: Editora 34, 2005.

CHAUÍ, M. **Convite à filosofia**. São Paulo: Ática, 2003.

COLLI, G. **O nascimento da filosofia**. Tradução Federico Carotti. 2. ed. Campinas: Editora UNICAMP, 1992.

CORNFORD, F. M. **Antes e depois de Sócrates**. Tradução Valter Lellis Siqueira. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2001.

DETIENNE, M. **A escrita de Orfeu**. Tradução Mário da Gama Kury. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1991.

DETIENNE, M. **A invenção da mitologia**. Tradução André Teles, Gilza Martins Saldanha da Gama. 2. ed. Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1998.

DORION, L.-A. **Compreender Sócrates**. 4. ed. Tradução Lúcia M. E. Orth. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2011.

ENGLISH, A. **Discontinuity in learning:** Dewey, Herbart, and education as transformation. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

FIORI, E. M. Aprender a dizer a sua palavra. (Prefácio). *In*: FREIRE, P (ed.). **Pedagogia do oprimido**. 12. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1983.

FREITAG, B. **Dialogando com Jürgen Habermas**. Rio de Janeiro: Tempo Brasileiro, 2005.

GUSDORF, G. **A palavra**. Brasília: Academia Monergista, 2021.

GUTHRIE, W. K. C. **The Sophists**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977. DOI: http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511627385.

HABERMAS, J. **Para a reconstrução do materialismo histórico**. São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1983.

HABERMAS, J. **Teoria de la acción comunicativa:** complementos y estudios previos. 3. ed. Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 1997.

HABERMAS, J. **Agir comunicativo e razão destranscendentalizada**. Rio de Janeiro: Tempo Brasileiro, 2002a.

HABERMAS, J. **Pensamento pós-metafísico**. Rio de Janeiro: Tempo Brasileiro, 2002b.

HABERMAS, J. **Verdade e justificação:** ensaios filosóficos. São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 2004.

HABERMAS, J. **Técnica e ciência como ideologia**. Lisboa: Edições 70, 2009.

HABERMAS, J. **Teoria do agir comunicativo 1:** racionalidade da ação e racionalização social. São Paulo: WMF Martins Fontes, 2012.

HASTEDT, H. **Was ist Bildung?** Eine Textanthologie. Stuttgart: Reclam, 2012.

HESÍODO. **Teogonia**: a origem dos deuses. Tradução Jaa Torrano. São Paulo: Iluminuras, 2020.

HOMERO. **Ilíada**. Tradução Frederico Lourenço. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2013.

Rev. Ibero-Am. Estud. Educ., 20, e19186, 2025

11/12

ISÓCRATES. Antídosis. *In*: LACERDA, T. C. E. **As reflexões metadiscursivas no discurso Antídose de Isócrates**. 2016. Tese (Doutorado em Letras Clássicas) – Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2016. Disponível em: https://teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/8/8143/tde-02122016-141549/pt-br.php. Acesso em: 14 set. 2023.

JAEGER, W. *Paideia*: a formação do homem grego. 4. ed. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2003.

JOAS, H. Die ünglickliche Ehe von Hermeneutik und Funktionalismus. *In*: HONNETH, A.; JOAS, H. (ed.). **Kommunikatives Handeln:** Beiträge zu Jürgen Habermas' "Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns". Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002.

KANT, I. **Resposta à pergunta:** o que é esclarecimento? *In*: KANT, I. (ed). **Textos Seletos**. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2005.

KERFERD, G. B. **O movimento sofista**. Tradução Margarida Oliva. São Paulo: Loyola, 2003.

KIRK, G. S.; RAVEN, J. E. **The presocratic philosophers**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.

MACCARTHY, T. **Kritik der Verständigungsverhältnisse:** zur Theorie von Jürgen Habermas. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980.

MARROU, H.-I. **História da educação na antiguidade**. Tradução Mário Leônidas Casanova. São Paulo: EPU, 1990.

MÜLLER-DOOHM, S. (ed.). **Das Interesse der Vernunf:** Rückblicke auf das Werk von Jürgen Habermas seit "Erkenntnis und Interesse". Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000.

PLATÃO. **A República**. Tradução Maria Helena da Rocha Pereira. Lisboa: Calouste Gulbenkian, 2001.

PLATÃO. **Eutidemo**. Tradução Maura Iglésias. Rio de Janeiro: PUCRio, 2011.

PLATÃO. **Primeiro Alcibíades - Segundo Alcibíades**. Tradução Carlos Alberto Nunes. Belém: Ed. UFPA, 2015.

PLATÃO. **Górgias**. Tradução Daniel R. N. Lopes. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2020.

PLATÃO. Apologia de Sócrates. *In*: PLATÃO (ed.). **Diálogos III** – Socráticos: Fedro; Eutífron, Apologia de Sócrates; Críton, Fédon. 2. ed. São Paulo: Edipro, 2015.

ROUSSEAU, J.-J. **Emílio, ou, Da educação**. Tradução Roberto Leal Ferreira. 4. ed. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2014.

SEVERINO, A. J. A busca do sentido na formação humana: tarefa da filosofia da educação. **Educação e Pesquisa**, São Paulo, v. 32, n. 3, p. 619-634, 2006. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1590/S1517-97022006000300013

SIEBENEICHLER, F. B. **Jurgen Habermas:** razão comunicativa e emancipação. Rio de Janeiro: Tempo Brasileiro, 1989.

SPINELLI, M. Ética e política: a edificação do éthos cívico da *paideia* grega. São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 2017.

THUCYDIDES. **The Peloponnesian War**. Translation Martin Hammond. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

VERNANT, J. P. **As origens do pensamento grego**. Tradução Ísis Borges da Fonseca. Rio de Janeiro: Difel, 2002.

ZATTI, V. La cuestión de la técnica y la ciencia en Jürgen Habermas. **Revista Iberoamericana de Ciencia, Tecnología y Sociedad**, Buenos Aires, v. 11, n. 31, p. 29-47, 2016. DOI: https://doi.org/10.52712/issn.1850-0013-478

ZATTI, V.; PAGOTTO-EUZEBIO, M. S. **Educação como processo de formação humana:** uma revisão em filosofia da educação ante a premência da utilidade. São Paulo: Universidade de São Paulo, Faculdade de Educação, 2022. DOI: https://doi.org/10.11606/9786587047294

Rev. Ibero-Am. Estud. Educ., 20, e19186, 2025

12/12