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ARTICLE

FROM THE ART OF COURTING TO THE DIALECTICS OF LOVE: THE FORMATIVE COMPLEMENTARY BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE LOVERS

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ABSTRACT: The essay deals with the idea of formative Eros present in Plato's *Banquet*, based on the interpretation made by Michel Foucault in the second volume of his *History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasures*. First, we seek to reconstruct the architecture of Foucauldian research on aphrodisia, which unfolds into dietetics, economics, and erotics, locating the dialectics of love within erotics. In the sequel, the formative aspect of the *Banquet* is discussed, highlighting especially the reciprocity between erasta (the lover) and eromenon (the beloved), and assuming that the ontological turn of the dialectic of love points directly to the ethical-formative dimension of Eros, according to the argument of the dialogue. Eros related to individual and particular beauty (i.e., as contingent and empirical) can only be overcome by the universal perspective of love when the one (the erasta) is allowed to assume the position of the other (the eromenon) and vice versa.

Keywords: formative Eros, aphrodisia, dialectic, erasta, eromenon.

DA ARTE DA CORTE À DIALÉTICA DO AMOR: A COMPLEMENTARIEDADE FORMATIVA ENTRE OS AMANTES DO SABER

RESUMO: O ensaio trata da ideia de Eros formativo presente no *Banquete*, de Platão, a partir da interpretação feita por Michel Foucault no segundo volume de sua *História da sexualidade: o uso dos prazeres*. Primeiro, busca-se reconstruir a arquitetônica da investigação foucaultiana acerca dos aphrodisia, que se desdobra em dietética, econômica e erótica, localizando a dialética do amor no interior da erótica. Na sequência, discute-se o aspecto formativo do *Banquete*, destacando, especialmente, a reciprocidade entre erasta (o amante) e erômeno (o amado), e assumindo que a guinada ontológica da dialética do amor aponta diretamente para a dimensão ético-formativa do Eros, de acordo com o argumento do diálogo. O Eros relacionado à beleza individual e particular (ou seja, como contingente e empírico) só pode ser superado pela perspectiva universal do amor quando for permitido a um (o erasta) assumir a posição do outro (o erômeno) e vice-versa.

Palavras-chave: Eros formativo, aphrodisia, dialética, erasta, erômeno.

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DEL ARTE DE LA CORTE A LA DIALÉCTICA DEL AMOR: COMPLEMENTARIDAD FORMATIVA ENTRE LOS AMANTES DEL CONOCIMIENTO

RESÚMEN: El ensayo aborda la idea del Eros formativo presente en el *Banquete*, de Platón, basado en la interpretación realizada por Michel Foucault en el segundo volumen de su *Historia de la sexualidad: el uso de los placeres*. Primero, busca reconstruir la arquitectura de la investigación hecha por Foucault acerca de los aphrodisia, que se desarrolla en dietética, económica y erótica, ubicando la dialéctica del amor dentro de la erótica. En la secuencia, se discute el aspecto formativo del *Banquete* platónico, destacando, especialmente, la complemetaridad formativa entre erasta (el amante) y erômeno (el amado), y suponiendo que el cambio ontológico de la dialéctica del amor apunta directamente a la dimensión ético-formativa de Eros, según el argumento del diálogo. Eros relacionado con la belleza individual y particular (es decir, contingente y empírico) solo puede ser superado por la perspectiva universal del amor cuando uno (erasta) puede asumir la posición del otro (el eromeno) y viceversa.

Palabras clave: Eros formativo, aphrodisia, dialéctica, erasta, erômeno.

INTRODUCTION

The *Banquet* is a classic text dealing with a classic theme. Plato develops an innovative theory of love that arouses interest, even today, not only in philosophy, but also in other areas of human culture, such as literature, theology, psychoanalysis and education. Starting from the current understanding of love in his time, he elevates it from the restricted scope of the corporeal beauty of a particular individual to that of universal beauty, bringing out the problematic imbrication between the perspectives of the beautiful, the good, and the true.[3]

Plato, in the dialogue, summarizes the theogonic, rhetorical, political, medical, and comic-tragic (poetic) meanings of Eros to then elevate it to the philosophical level, elaborating the dialectic of love. Our interest in this essay focuses precisely on the formative aspect inherent in the dialectics of love. To investigate it, we rely on Michel Foucault's interpretation, developed in the second volume of the *History of Sexuality*, entitled "The Use of Pleasures". In the first part, we reconstruct the general features of the art of courting, highlighting some limitations inherent to the moral of honor that sustains it. In the second part, we bring up the constitutive core of the dialectics of love, showing the formative facet of both the erasta (lover) and the eromenon (beloved). We conclude with brief considerations about the actuality of the love-formative relationship between lovers, taking them as a reference to think about the wider pedagogical relationship between educator and student.

We try to sustain the core of our argument in the following hypothesis: the ontological turn that guarantees the passage from the art of courting to the dialectics of love would depend on the formative force of Eros. That is, the elevation from a personal point of view, guided by human desire centered on individual corporeal beauty, to the comprehensive point of view, founded on the contemplation of beauty itself, is made possible by the complementary formative relationship between erasta and eromenon. Thus, Plato lays the roots of an educational theory whose effects continue to resonate even today, insofar as he raises to the highest point the formative tension between the lovers of knowledge: for both to be able to embark on the loving path for wisdom, they need to take an active position in the relationship and assume their own condition as subjects. Thus, from the formative point of view, the dialectic of love requires the tensional and conflictive relationship between its two poles, ringing the loving bond between the lovers of knowledge. In this sense, Eros is precisely the force or impulse that assures the condition of active subject to both the teacher and the learner who are on their way in search of wisdom.

[3] For an occasional philosophical reflection on the problem of the imbrication between beautiful, good, and true, as well as on other problems in the *Banquet*, see G. R. F. Ferrari (2013, pp. 293-325).

THE ART OF THE COURTING

Foucault focuses on the *Banquet* in the last chapter of the second volume of the *History of Sexuality*, entitled "The Use of Pleasures. In this work, he investigates the aphrodisia as techne of the art of living, that is, as a broad field of moral care, in which the lovers (erasta and eromenon) seek to give meaning to what they do or do not do. As a field of moral care, the aphrodisia contain, first of all, the chresis, that is, the "manner in which an individual directs his sexual activity, his way of conducting himself in this order of things, the regime he allows or imposes on himself, the conditions under which he performs sexual acts, the importance he attaches to them in his life" (FOUCAULT, 1985, p. 51). Therefore, chresis refers to the pursuit of the temperate use of pleasures, causing vicious passions to be controlled by virtuous passions.

However, chresis needs enkrateia - and this is the second moral aspect of aphrodisia - that is, the ceaseless struggle that the subject must maintain with himself in order to make virtuous use of pleasures. Thus, enkrateia is the condition for the possibility of sophrosyne (temperance). A term from the Socratic vocabulary that, via cynicism and stoicism, became established in philosophical literature as an indication of self-control, enkrateia is the path and guarantee of a temperate life. The decisive point here, and which will return, under another ethical perspective, in the scope of the dialectic of love, is that without effort (ponos) and work on oneself (askesis), there is no possibility of sophrosyne. The thesis that sophrosyne depends on enkrateia needs to be understood, however, in a precise sense, namely, that the temperate way of life itself is only possible as continuous exercise and activity; that is, in order to make ethical use of pleasures, an arduous daily battle is required. However, what does the notion of *exercise* mean in terms of philosophy? More precisely, what notion of philosophy is capable of ensuring the moral care of aphrodisia? This double questioning touches the very last Foucault's thought. It is philosophy as an ascetic mode of life, that is, as a reflective mode of human practices, which springs from such practices and which seeks to meditate on them, but in an especially ethical way. It is the subject that must take himself as the subject of action and be convinced that his life will only take on ethical meaning when he is willing to do this permanent exercise, aiming at his own self-transformation. In summary, this notion of philosophy refers to a long and ancient tradition, according to which the love for wisdom is umbilically related to askesis, resulting from it and happening only through it.[4]

In the context of the aphrodisia, however, the notion of askesis takes on a well-defined form: in order to make proper use of his pleasures, the subject must prepare himself long and continuously, and the exercises synthesize this form of preparation. To take the aphrodisia as the field of moral care means to investigate the different exercises, or at least the most expressive ones, that make ethical preparation possible. However, philosophy as asceticism is referred, in classical Greece, to a much broader field, involving all areas of life, especially the question of the regulation of the political activity of free man in the polis. This is a nuclear reference of the relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades, treated by Plato in some of his dialogues. The underlying thesis is always the same, namely, that the relationship between the government of the self and the government of others has a complementary, deep, and inseparable ethical imbrication. In the words of Foucault (1985, p. 69):

> And he [Plato] associates this requirement of exercise with the need to take care of oneself: the epimeleia heautou, the application to oneself that is a precondition to be able to take care of others and to direct them, includes not only the need to know (to know what one ignores, to know that one is ignorant, to know what one is), but also the need to effectively apply oneself and to exercise and transform oneself.

Therefore, philosophy as askesis implies the imbrication between ethics and politics and, more precisely, the thesis that the ethical basis regulating political action in the public sphere (polis) presupposes an intense formative process in which citizenship and virtue are intertwined. And, most importantly, such imbrication is supported by a demanding ethics of the subject about himself, whose basis rests on self-examination, that is, on permanent self-government. In the words of Francis Wolf

[4] On philosophy as a way of life supported by permanent spiritual exercises, see Pierre Hadot (2006).

(1992, p. 137): "It is this relation with oneself, beyond practices and beyond codes, that is the object of Foucault's interrogation and the subject of his genealogy of morality".

In the second volume of the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault schematizes the exercises concerning the moral care that one must have in the use of pleasures in three major dimensions, investigating in detail the singularity of each one of them: dietetic, economic, and erotic. These three dimensions constitute the architecture of the aphrodisia and are considered as "recognized practices," "nucleus of problematization," "arts of conducting oneself," and, above all, as three great "techniques of the self," which gather together the set of exercises through which the free man seeks to polish himself in order to exercise, in the way that befits him, his political participation in the public sphere. Therefore, as we saw above, philosophical asceticism always presupposes human formation as an amalgam of virtue and citizenship. Thus, states Foucault (1985, p. 71):

> Moral askesis is part of the paideia of the free man who has a role to play in the city and in relation to others; [...] all this [the set of exercises] is, at the same time, formation of the man who will be useful for the city and moral exercise of the one who wants to master himself.

It is, therefore, the broad formation that needs to account, simultaneously and reciprocally, for self-government and political participation in the public sphere (polis).

As far as dietetics is concerned, it encompasses the set of regimes that guide the life of the human being, including the care of the body that is simultaneously related to the care of the soul. In this sense, the entire physical regimen, with its respective exercises, represents the search for the body's improvement, in an attempt to achieve temperance in human action. As Foucault (1985, p. 97) points out: "The diet of the body, in order to be reasonable, to adjust itself as it suits the circumstances and the moment, must also be a matter of thought, reflection, and prudence. That is why, driven by this ideal, Platonic philosophy, as well as all ancient philosophy in general, let itself be inspired by the *Hippocratic Treatises*, especially by its ethical notion of health as a great balance between the human organism and the physis. The reflection on the use of pleasures, and especially, as is the case here, on regimens, must function analogously as in medicine, since, aiming at the patient's autonomy, the physician must explain and give reasons for the patient himself to regulate his way of life as it suits him. Now, it is precisely this broader ethical requirement of dietetics that puts ancient medicine on the path of philosophy, even making Socratic ethics itself put its roots in some of the *Hippocratic Treatises* (JAEGER, 1973).[5]

The economic, in turn, is the practice of domestic government, referring to the power the husband exercises over himself in the practice of the power he exercises over his wife. It is as a married being that the man needs to exercise as befits the dominion over his pleasures. As Foucault warns, "to be married means here, first of all, to be head of the family, to have an authority, to exercise a power that has in the home its place of application and, within this framework, to maintain obligations that have an effect on the reputation of the citizen" (FOUCAULT, 1985, p. 135).

In the economic it is, therefore, about the cultivation of the self that the free man, as a husband, needs to exercise in the sphere of the oikos in order to participate well in the deliberations of the polis. Reflecting on the governance of the family economy, on what goes on inside the home, becomes indispensable as preparation for the form of governance to be exercised in the public sphere. In this sense, sexual choices and the uses of pleasures are also directly related to a man's *status* of power in the governance of the home and in the evidence of mastery of self that he is able to offer in the practice of such power. Just as in dietetics, in economics, the regulating principle of temperance takes the lead: "man is called upon to temper his conduct according to the dominion he hopes to exercise over himself, and the moderation with which he wants to make his dominion over others function" (FOUCAULT, 1985, p. 162). In this way, in economics, the link between self-government and the government of others also appears in an accentuated manner, with good government of others depending on the capacity of self-mastery that the man, as a husband, demonstrates in the government of the home.

[5] For a Gadamerian hermeneutic interpretation of the Hippocratic sense of health and its possible actuality, see C. A. Dalbosco, F. Santos, R. Maraschin, and L. O. Cezar (2020).

Finally, erotics refers to the art of courtship that regulates the loving behavior between the adult (erasta) and the boy (eromenon). Moral care appears there, in this dimension of the aphrodisia, as the dominion that lovers need to exercise over themselves, avoiding the subjugation of one over the other. This form of love was called pederasty and played an important formative role in Classical Greece: the experienced adult was responsible for initiating the inexperienced adolescent into the world. As Foucault (1985, p. 174) explains: "the relations that can be established between an older man who has finished his training - and who is supposed to play the social, moral, and sexually active role - and a younger man who has not reached his status and needs help, advice, and support.

One must also consider that philosophical-formative reflection on this specific type of love originates from complex cultural practices and that, before they became the subject of philosophical reflection, they already existed as part of a broad, open and singular social game. The fact is that sexual behavior and conduct resulting from such a game should be guided by moral care based on the boy's ethic of honor, which, as we will see below, was not always the case, and perhaps not even in most cases.

At any rate, the core of this ethics of honor is very similar to the moral care proper to both dietetics and economics: "moral reflection is then not so much devoted to defining as strictly as possible the codes to be respected and the framework of permitted and forbidden acts, as to characterizing the type of attitude, the type of relation with oneself that is required" (FOUCAULT, 1985, p. 185).

In this sense, in order to be able to resist the onslaughts of the perverse erasta or, conversely, to yield freely to the experiential wisdom of the shaping erasta, the eromenon (boy) needs to show himself to be somewhat temperate. In short, the honor principle of the art of courtship demarcates a general style of conduct: to be in constant combat with oneself and to exercise oneself permanently with a view to self-mastery, that is, ethical self-government.

The problem is that this kind of love that aphrodisia assumes in the relationship between the erasta and the eromenon is not always guided by the required moral care. It is therefore important to point out some inherent limitations of the art of courtship, because they are precisely what drive the Platonic critique of elusive love and, at the same time, its defense of true love. We would like to briefly mention a few related limitations. The first refers to the authoritarian domination exercised by the erasta over the eromene: as the political and economic holder of Eros, the erasta can assume an unquestionable active role, seeking to satisfy his desires at any cost, making the eromene's youthful beauty the object of the fulfillment of his pleasures. The second limitation rests on the constant threat that the dominant position of the erasta himself suffers in the face of the eromenon's youthful beauty: being seduced by the boy's beauty, the dominating adult falls, himself, into the opposite condition, going from dominating active subject to the passive condition, of unrestricted alienation to the individual beauty of his beloved. The third limitation refers to the ambiguous condition of the eromenon within corrupted love relationships: when passive, he becomes the object of his lover, subjugating himself to the force of his selfish desires; however, when he assumes the dominating active position, he himself subjugates his lover, making him the servant of his youthful beauty. Finally, the fourth limitation concerns the deterioration of the love relationship in the art of courtship: for example, when the eromene is abandoned to his own fate by his erasta; also, when the relationship takes the dishonorable form that puts the eromene in total dependence on his erasta; finally, when the erasta imposes, in the love game, rewards, benefits, and services that throw the eromene to shame, reducing him to shadow in the public sphere.

These limitations jeopardize the ideal of self-government sought by moral care in the use of pleasures proper to the art of courtship. In one way or another, erasta and eromenon establish dominating relationships that subjugate one, the other, or, simultaneously, both. This deterioration of love relationships has a destructive effect, because it restrains what is central to the ethical basis of human formation, namely, that both lover and beloved build themselves as active subjects in the relationship. This is the reason for PLATO'S concern, in the *Banquet*, to develop a theory of Eros that would be able to guarantee the passage from the art of courtship to the dialectics of love. In the following, we will deal with the dialectic of love and the new profile of erasta and eromenon that results from it.

DIALECTICS OF LOVE

We have reconstructed, in broad strokes, the Foucauldian architecture of the use of pleasures, following his tripartite investigation of the aphrodisia as moral care unfolded into dietetics, economics, and erotics. This reconstruction was necessary for us to better understand how Foucault inserts the Banquet's philosophy of love into the realm of erotics, conceived as the reflected art of love. As we will see below, the art of love assumes, in the specific context of this dialogue, the relation to truth. However, the reflected art of love characterized as the search for truth is only possible by the passage from the art of courtship to the dialectic of love. In this context, the following questions are important: what specific form does Eros [always capitalized?] take when referring to truth? And the properly pedagogical-formative question of the *Banquet*: what profile and what kind of relationship do erasta and eromenon assume within the dialectic of love? In other words, how does Socrates present himself as the master of truth and what kind of love does Alcibiades declare to him?

With regard specifically to the first question, the new signification of Eros depends, according to Foucault, on the ontological turn that ensures the passage from the art of the court to the dialectic of love. At the basis of this passage is the philosophical shift operated by PLATO, positioning the reflection on Eros in the strictly ontological scope of the problem: it is no longer a matter of reflecting on the amorous conduct that involves all the constituent ingredients of the art of courtship among lovers, that is, what each of them needs to do best to seduce the object of their desire, but rather of questioning what love is, what its nature is, and how it relates to truth. Foucault points out such a shift as follows:

> Now, to pose the question in this way implies first a displacement of the very object of discourse. Diotima reproaches Socrates - but in fact all the authors of the preceding eulogies - for having sought, from the side of the "beloved" element (ton eromenon), the principle of what should be said of love; they allowed themselves, therefore, to be overshadowed by the charm, beauty, and perfection of the beloved boy and unduly attributed these merits to love itself; this could only tell its own truth if it asked it of what it is and not of whom it loves. One must therefore [in the original quoted, return from the beloved element to the one who loves (to eron) and interrogate in himself. (FOUCAULT, 1985, p. 207).

Foucault establishes, as the first important aspect of the passage, that the discourse on Eros in court art revolves around the beloved, mainly his individual physical qualities, the beauty of his body and the delicacy of his gestures. This being so, the misstep taken by the speeches of all the symposium participants that preceded the priestess' intervention was to attribute to Eros that which was only part of the individual qualities of the beloved object. And love, true love, obviously cannot rest only on the individual qualities of the human being, however beautiful he may be. There is also a distinctly formative problem here: the pedagogical Eros that flows from this, as we saw above, is quickly exhausted, because it depends on an ephemeral beauty and a passing satisfaction, generally selfish and self-interested, of the lover. When the beauty of the beloved is over, or the lover's desire is satiated, Eros loses the meaning of existence, and the fiery energy that moved him is also extinguished. For having settled in human transitoriness and having taken it as definitive, Eros sees his light fade away. In this sense, the self-deceit of lovers, both erastatic and eromenal, in taking the ephemeral as definitive, wanting to elevate that which is vulnerable to the eternal condition, can only be overcome by a change of perspective that can recognize the fragility of Eros without, at the same time, annihilating its transforming force. Foucault is clear, then, that it is not the art of courtship, but the dialectic of love, that is capable of accomplishing this task. Hence, in this sense, the spiritual and formative greatness of philosophical dialectics in relation to other cultural and professional expressions, such as rhetoric, medicine, and tragic-comic poetry. Dialectic puts the problem of truth on another level, making it emerge from the erotic game between questions and answers, conducted by a new profile of erasta (Socrates), who, upon recognizing his ignorance, no longer obsessively sticks to the embellishment of words, nor is seduced by the physical beauty of the beloved, but rather makes his dialectical exercise the sincere search for truth. It is Socrates' self-government in relation to the possible seductions, caused by individual beauty, that transforms him into an erotic force for his eromenon, elevating him from the sphere of doxa to the search for knowledge, or from the sphere of elusive love to the search for the true. Therefore, his self-mastery transforms him into a master who, for having reached a higher virtuous condition (of excellence), assumes the role of spiritual conductor of the soul of his disciples, directing them, by means of constant questioning, to the search for the love of wisdom.

It is necessary to consider that Foucault's interpretation of the dialectic of love in the *Banquet* is part of his larger philosophical project of elaborating a new genealogy of the subject, which began to intensify in the late 1970s and became the core of his intellectual production in the last four years of his existence. Contrary to two dominant perspectives of interpretation of the subject, the analytic and the Marxist, Foucault seeks to reposition the subject in the historical domain of the practices and processes through which it is continuously transformed. In this sense, volumes II and III of the *History of Sexuality* investigate, each in its own way, the different practices of the self, that is, the different technologies of the self, that occurred in Greco-Latin Antiquity, which aim at the ethical formation of the subject. It is also in this sense that the material gathered in these two volumes, published only after Foucault's death, prepare the intellectual basis for the investigations of the 1980s, including among them, mainly, the 1982 course, later published under the title of *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*. The fact is that the new genealogy of the subject, based on the investigation of the old practices of the self, opens the possibility of placing the subject in an active condition, granting it a certain relative autonomy. With this, then, we have the philosophical background that allows us to understand the relationship between erast and eromen as a complementary and tensioned relationship in terms of a dialectic of love in which both lover and beloved seek autonomy, although never guaranteed or achieved definitively, because such autonomy "is the folding of the processes of subjectivation over the procedures of subjection, according to duplications, according to the flavor of history, that more or less cover each other" (GROS, 2004, p. 637).

A second aspect of what has been said highlights the importance of the ontological turn as a philosophical underpinning of the dialectic of love. Foucault clarifies that the truth of Eros depends on the investigation of what he is in himself; this requires the ontological shift, with clear pedagogical-formative developments, from "the one he loves" (ton eromenon) to "the one he loves" (to eron). Eros regains his brilliance, being able to illuminate what is around him not only when he abandons the restrictive focus of the figure of the beloved, but also when he becomes detached from the immediate, merely selfish desires of the lover. In the context of the ontological turn, the relationship between the lovers takes on a different level, and is conducted directly by the experiential wisdom of the erasta. In summary, the shift alluded to above assigns the herasta an indispensable role in the search for true love. However, the performance of such a role depends on the presence of the eromenon and on a certain specific way, not only ontological but also formative, of treating him. In view of this, it becomes opportune to ask: what capacities must the hermast possess to assume such an elevated role? Can he effectively fulfill this grandiose task? And, also, in what conditions can he support the search for the true Eros, taking the eromenon seriously? These questions, by profiling the ontological condition of the erast, define, at the same time, the formative force of Eros, pulling the eromenon out of his passive condition and putting him in the position of an active subject, who starts to be bothered by his previous condition, that of being moved only by his individual corporeal beauty. In this way, the eromenon, when touched (hooked) by the erotic force of the erasta, begins to perceive the beauty of other bodies, the beauty of political life in the polis, of knowledge and contemplation of beauty itself.

Therefore, the ontological turn puts the lovers on the path to true love. We can no longer think, as is still commonly thought, that Platonic love is free of limitations and that, since it presupposes a perfect human condition, it would be unattainable by human beings themselves. One of the merits of Foucault's interpretation consists precisely in insisting that the ontological turn, instead of distancing Eros from the human condition, placing it in an unreachable level, does exactly the opposite, hitting it full on, by revealing its tragic ambiguity. The priestess' discourse, clearly allowing itself to be guided by the ontological path of words, attributes dialectical rigor to the theogony (Phaedrus), medicine (Eriximachus), comedy (Aristophanes), and tragedy (Agathon), reworking philosophically the original myth from which Eros originates. Now, it is the philosophical reinterpretation of myth that allows the fragility of the human condition to emerge with previously unperceived intensity. As the priestess reminds us, during the festivities commemorating the birth of Aphrodite, goddess of beauty, Poros (Resource) fertilizes Penia (Poverty), who will give birth to Eros, thereby marking his ambivalent condition: he is the child of both bonanza and poverty, of fullness and emptiness, of excess and lack.

In this context, Donaldo Schüler summarizes well the meaning of Eros' double filiation: "Degraded to the son of Resource and Poverty, Eros leaves the world of Zeus and falls into the domain of man. He survives wounded, contaminated with death, limited and slow. This is no longer the Eros

that wounds. It suits him better the image of the wounded, yearning being, thirsting for help for the incurable" (SCHÜLER, 2001, p. 82).

Once fallen into the human domain, Eros is characterized by fragility and lack, and it is precisely from this lack that the need for culture, and especially education, arises. If he were complete, he would no longer need to seek knowledge, for he would already be in possession of the truth; if he were fully satisfied, he would no longer have desire, and thus the presence of the other would be indifferent to him. Lover and beloved become entangled in a love struggle because they both lack something, and Eros, a force that is half human and half divine, regulates this struggle so that the lovers can free themselves from their immediate desires and, in a complementary way, set out in search of true love.

Eros' maternal filiation, when duly recognized by himself, prevents him from wanting to arrogantly assume the omnipotent condition. For this reason, the presence of his mother constantly reminds him of his humble origin and, in respect to this origin, the need to try to act as he should, without pretending to be, arrogantly, what he is not. His paternal filiation, in turn, leads Eros not to become entrenched in his own limitation, and passively accept the fate of his vulnerability. On the other hand, Resource opens to him the world of capacities, enabling him to call the other to come to his rescue, to overcome his own limitations. The dialectic of love consists, then, in wanting to overcome the limitations of poverty without falling into the temptations of pride. And this overcoming implies struggle, asceticism, and ceaseless work of self on self. It is not a matter, therefore, of attributing dominance neither to Resource alone nor to Poverty alone, since one, in isolation, cannot exist without the other: if Eros is gestated and given birth by Penia, it can only be so because it was fecundated by Poros. Therefore, it is the permanent tension between excess and lack that makes Eros a mediating figure; as such, he needs to interpret the meaning of the double language of which he is constituted, the human and the divine, having to put them in permanent dialogue. This double origin makes Eros what he is; if he were moved only by abundance, he would have no desire; constituted only by lack, he would not have enough strength to satisfy his own desire. If desire springs from lack, the possibility of satisfying it in an orderly way depends on the tempering human condition, that is, on self-government of oneself. It is precisely with the problem of self-mastery, that is, the lovers' self-government, that, as we will see next, the formative role of Eros gains strength and intensity.

In summary, when Eros is investigated in his origin, in his own nature, as he is in himself, he then emerges from the dialectic between two forces, Resource and Poverty, always having to walk a fine, "brittle" line, because the excessive predominance of one force would immediately lead to the death of the other and, finally, to the death of Eros himself. In this way, the *Banquet* shows, in its dialectical interpretation of the origin myth, the constitutive tension of Eros: he is a fragile being who possesses the capacity to rise above his own fragility, but not in a definitive nor absolute way, since his lack is "incurable". In any case, the ontological turn opens a fertile field for the human formative process, for by raising the relationship between the lovers to the level of an inescapable complementarity, it prepares them for the search for truth. Next, we will analyze, following Foucault, in what sense the love game guided by the search for truth demands a profoundly ethical transformation of both the erasta and the eromenon.

The ontological shift causes, as we have seen, the displacement from the qualities of the beloved to the virtues of the lover, from the disciple to the master; that is, one passes from fleeting love, proper to the art of the court centered on the boy's honor, to true love, proper to the dialectic of love. This turn can lead to two misunderstandings that need to be avoided here: first, the position of absolute sovereignty of the erasta (master) and, second, the consequent corporal devaluation of the eromenon (disciple). As regards the unquestionable supremacy of the master, the dialectics of love cannot put him in an absolute position, unreachable by the disciple, because the search for truth is a path that is always traveled by two people, never in isolation, since the presence of the disciple helps even to supply the master's lack. Without the disciple's presence, the master would sink into the most absolute destructive solitude, without being able to put his erotic, formative energy into practice. The master only becomes a master and can assume this condition through his awareness of his own limitations. It is precisely this awareness that leads him to see the indispensability of the disciple, to take him seriously in his ethical significance, to treat him as another who also loves and can love in a true way. Now, it is the consideration

of the disciple in this ethical perspective that helps to smooth the twisted and tortuous path of the search for truth.

As far as the body is concerned, a possible second misunderstanding, its physical beauty, its harmony and delicacy in gestures, constitutes, as we have seen, the center of the art of courtship. Now, in the dialectics of love, individual beauty is seconded without the body itself being devalued. On the contrary, it is elevated to the condition of foundation of spirituality, assuming, therefore, an important role to ethically mark the relationship between the lovers: the physical beauty is led to see itself before the splendor of universal beauty and, with this, to have to confront beauty itself, resizing its needs and desires. Foucault clearly reconstructs the course set by Plato: "From a beautiful body, to the beautiful bodies, according to the beautiful formula of the *Banquet*, then to the souls, then to what is beautiful in the 'occupations,' 'the rules of conduct,' 'the knowledge,' until, finally, the gaze reaches 'the vast region already occupied by beauty,' the movement is continuous. (FOUCAULT, 1985, p. 209).

In this way, the beauty of the body, driven by the formative Eros, extends in a continuous movement to the vast region of the beautiful itself, passing through what is common in beauty among human beings.[6] The fact is that in the search for true love, new demands are placed on both the erasta and the eromenon, but none of them result in the depreciation of the body. In a clear corrective allusion to the great misinterpretation committed against Plato, Foucault lapidary concludes: "It is not the exclusion of the body that essentially characterizes, for Plato, true love; it is that it [the body] is, through the appearances of the object, relation with the truth" (FOUCAULT, 1985, p. 209). Therefore, when the body is confronted with the beautiful itself, it acquires energy so that, through the appearances of the object, it can relate to the truth. The body can never deny its condition of being in fine tune with "the appearances of the object" and of sometimes even being confused with them. It is up to the logos, however, to investigate in what sense "the appearances of the object" can lead to deception.

The dialectic of love consists, then, precisely in this, not in denying such appearances, but rather, in a continuous formative erotic movement, in seeking to put them, step by step, in contact with another dimension of human life, that is, with the one that is capable of going beyond individual beauty and seeing things from a general, more comprehensive and, certainly, less vitiated point of view. The great limit of erasta and eromenon in the realm of court art lies precisely in the fact that they have succumbed, each in their own way, to individual beauty and want to obsessively satiate their immediate desires. Now, confronted with the dialectical Eros, they feel compelled to broaden their view of individual beauty and reorder their own desires in the light of universal beauty. In summary, from now on, within the dialectic of love, what predominates and guides the relationship between lovers is the burning desire for wisdom, which is an indispensable condition for the search for true love.

We have dealt so far with the first question posed in the first paragraph of this topic, that is, with the content of the ontological turn that is the basis of the new meaning that Eros acquires within the dialectic of love. We must now turn our attention to the second question, outlining the features of the new profile that erasta and eromen acquire in the search for true love, also investigating the new form that the relationship between them takes in comparison with the art of courtship. Both lover and beloved must undergo profound transformation if they are to resist the seductions of individual beauty and the satisfaction of the ardent and immediate desires that result from it. This heroic battle with self makes noble the soul of the lovers, elevating them to true love. Before continuing with the *Banquet*, we refer to a passage from the *Fedro*, in which Plato summarizes an important aspect of the dialectic of love that takes over the relationship between lovers. Thus states the philosopher of love:

> Now, when the better part of the soul that leads to the well-ordered life and the love of wisdom wins, then they [lover and beloved] follow already right here a life that is happy and in accord with itself, because they know how to master themselves and possess virtuous conduct, triumphing over the evil part of the soul and freeing its excellent part that leads to virtue (FEDRO, 256a).[7]

In this sense, the *Fedro* describes how the lover and beloved relationship becomes entangled in a constant struggle between vice and virtue, and it is the victory of the better part of the soul that

[6] For a consistent interpretation of the Platonic dialogue from the perspective of *scala amoris*, see the study by Kurt Sier (1997).
[7] The Brazilian Portuguese translation of the German edition used, published by Insel Verlag, is by our authors.

ensures the experience of true love. This means to say, in other words, that virtue is excellence in the execution of action and precisely because of this it pushes the lovers in the direction of the search for truth. On the other hand, it becomes clear from this that Socrates' discourse in the *Fedro* shows the virtuous mastery of self as the result of an unceasing battle between the lovers, one with the other and each with himself. Foucault summarizes the contribution of this dialogue to the theory of love in the following terms: "Socrates described the path, the ardor, the sufferings of the one who loves and the hard fight he had to fight to master his equipage" (FOUCAULT, 1985, p. 210). Being inflamed by the energy of Eros and desiring to live true love, lover and beloved needed to be willing to embark on the difficult ethical path of self-control and resist the destructive force of their immediate, ephemeral, and passing desires. In this way, in the dialectic of love, unlike the art of courtship, both lover and beloved are driven to true love, and therefore both, and not only one, need to change their way of life. Foucault concludes, "Unlike in the 'art of courting,' the 'dialectic of love' requires here in the two lovers, two exactly similar movements; love is the same, since it is, for both the one and the other, the movement that snatches them towards the true." (FOUCAULT, 1985, p. 210).

However, this demand made to the two lovers imposes singularities to each of them: Socrates, precisely on account of his enkrateia, remains attentive to his appetites and desires; Alcibiades needs to get out of the mere condition of passive object, cuddled superbly in his own beauty, and place himself actively alongside Socrates in the search for love. One needs the other, for neither one alone can set out on the path of true Eros. In the sequel, we will deal first with the profile of Socrates, paradigm of the formative Eros, and then with Alcibiades, exemplary figure of the eromenon who, when he is surprised by the formative wisdom of the master, has before him the possibility of becoming a new erast himself. In Foucault's interpretation, the dialectic of love in the Banquet demands from Socrates an eminently ethical profile, causing Alcibiades to admire him precisely because of these moral qualities. Paradoxically, Socrates, "the old man with the dull body," takes on the role of eromenon, that is, he becomes the object of Alcibiades' love. But how is such an inversion possible? To become the master of the search for true love, Socrates needed to resist the seductions provoked by the boys' beauty, reaching such a high level of self-control that he aroused Alcibiades' infatuation. Because he had achieved the insight of "loving the true thing that should be loved," Socrates, with his bodily ugliness, nevertheless, and perhaps precisely because of this, aroused the intense love of the beautiful boy. By exercising self-control, he takes possession of the greatest wisdom possible, transforming it into formative Eros. With this, it attracts the disciple with the same bewitchment that pushes the moth into the light.

In summary, the nuclear point of the Foucauldian interpretation is that Socrates, within the dialectic of love, manages to become a master of truth, that is, of the incessant search for truth, because he assumes an ascetic way of life. These are then constant exercises, including physical trials, such as walking barefoot in the frost, as well as frequent spiritual exercises that require of him the ability to exempt himself from his own body and to concentrate on deep meditation with himself. All this makes him a temperate being, who is guided neither by excess nor by lack. Now, it is this temperance, hard won and always having to be tested daily, that makes him a master of the formative Eros on the path to truth. It is because he knew how to become master of himself, striving to find the measure of things and leaving free all that produces virtue, that Socrates attracted Alcibiades to the path of true love. Bewitched by the master's formative Eros, Alcibiades has the possibility of knowing more about universal beauty and how it, in its relationship with goodness, allows access to truth. However, to be able to do so, Alcibiades needs to overcome the limits of his viewpoint restricted to individual beauty.

Let us now turn more specifically to Alcibiades, trying to investigate, still in Foucault's company, in what sense he takes part of the formative Eros, in the ambiguous condition of being an eromenon who, by taking Socrates seriously, becomes a new erasta. In this ambiguous, polyvalent condition, Alcibiades can no longer, on the one hand, place himself in the passive position of being only the object of his master's desire. Socrates himself, as we have just seen, moved by the dialectic of love, would not accept taking Alcibiades as an eromenon to satisfy his immediate desires. Socrates, touched by the flame of true Eros and fighting an intense battle with himself, strives to overcome his immediate desires and, therefore, fascinates Alcibiades with the demonic power of his virtuous strength and leads him to do the same. On the other hand, when Alcibiades recognizes in Socrates the power of the formative Eros, he needs to do it in the condition of an independent eromenon, that is, without

annihilating his own self before the erotic force of the master. Now, this ambivalence inherent in Alcibiades' position needs to be understood more closely, since it constitutes, on the side of the eromenon, the very dialectic of love: to seek his condition as an active subject inflamed by the flame of the master's formative Eros, but to do it in such a way that it does not compromise the possibility of becoming, himself, a future erast.

Plato reserves to Alcibiades, in the *Banquet*, the last speech in praise of love. Alcibiades, in turn, does not praise love, but rather Socrates' formative Eros. This is, perhaps, in the history of the formative relationship between erasta and eromenon, between master and disciple, one of the most passionate compliments, one of the most beautiful acknowledgments that a disciple can pay to his master. Alcibiades, as we know from the Platonic narrative, enters the house of Agathon, where the symposium was taking place, drunk and shrill, speaking loudly and dragging behind him a group of idlers, as drunk as he was. He wants to visit Agathon, the handsome young man, but comes across Socrates, whose presence disconcerts him. Upon seeing Socrates, Alcibiades rises to a different kind of drunkenness, changes his perspective, and begins to see what was previously blinding him. Instead of making a speech praising love, like all the other orators before him, he prefers to publicly highlight Socrates' virtues.

Alcibiades' eulogy to Socrates is long and covers many facets of the master's formative Eros. He says, for example, that Socrates is the only one who makes him turn in on himself and realize his own deficiencies; that he provokes him to permanent self-examination, leading him to feel ashamed of what he does or fails to do; that he is the only one who can pull him out of the political world and its unhealthy passion for popularity. All of this Alcibiades sincerely recognizes in Socrates, even if this recognition is against his own attitudes and unmasks him in front of his own companions. But particularly enlightening are the two metaphors he uses to expose the virtues of his master's formative Eros: first, he compares Socrates to a statue of sylenus, and then to a man bitten by a poisonous snake. These two metaphors say a lot about the tenacious, fiery effect that the master's formative work has on the disciple. The small sculptures of Silene placed in the workshops of the statuaries were very ugly on the outside, but, when opened, they had inside statuettes of gods, that is, a priceless inner wealth. So was Socrates, ugly in physical appearance, but rich in the cultivation of the spirit; ugly on the outside, but beautiful on the inside. As for the metaphor of the snake, Alcibiades compares the effect that Socrates' words have on his soul with the reaction a man feels when bitten by a poisonous snake. If the poison provokes horrifying retorts, leaving the one who suffered the bite out of his mind, the philosophical speeches moved by the formative Eros have an even deeper action than the poison of vipers, when they act in the young and well-born soul and lead it to say and do everything (PLATO, 1991a, 218a).

In Alcibiades' metaphorical description, Socrates holds the inner wealth of a Silene and provokes a more violent retort, to those willing to listen to him, than the venom of the most tenebrous viper. Yet what does the high praise of Socrates show of the profile of Alcibiades himself? In what sense does it make him an independent eromenon, simultaneously turning him into a new erasta? The recognition of the intoxicating force of the master's formative Eros, if really taken to its ultimate consequences, would provoke a profound transformation in the disciple, forcing Alcibiades to give up his vanity, self-sufficiency, and his deep narcissistic infatuation. In the words of Donaldo Schüler (2001, p. 94): "Alcibiades confesses the unmentionable, exposes his inner wound, his weakness, which does not and cannot appear in the pages of history, a weakness that, when told by another, would not deserve to be trusted".

But wouldn't this recognition of Socrates deify him excessively? How does the master of formative Eros protect himself from the risk of his own narcissism? Foucault comes to our rescue again: "Socrates introduces another kind of domination: that which is exercised by the master of truth and for which he is qualified by the sovereignty he exercises over himself" (FOUCAULT, 1985, p. 212). That is, it is precisely his great virtue, referred to the mastery of the self, that transforms Socrates suddenly and paradoxically into the new eromenon, whose experiential wisdom is ardently loved by Alcibiades, the new erasta. Alcibiades is then transported, by the force of the dialectics of love, to the condition of erastric, of a lover who no longer covets only the individual beauty of the beloved, because Socrates has not corporeal beauty, but a wisdom that springs from his tireless search for self-government.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In the *Banquet*, Plato develops a new theory of love in counterpoint to the praising theories existing at the time. With unequalled philosophical-literary finesse, he knew how to critically retain what was acceptable in the praise of love of rhetorical, medical, political and comic-tragic origin. His dialectics of love made it possible to move from an individualistic perspective, restricted to the satisfaction of desires rooted in individual bodily beauty, to a more comprehensive point of view, built by the tension between the normative ideals of beauty, goodness, and truth. In the core of this ontological shift from the seductions imposed by individual bodily beauty to the question of what is beauty itself, there is a profound idea of human formation, which always requires a complementary relationship between lovers, partners in the cooperative search for truth, making, in the fiery experience of the love game, one strives to understand the other's point of view.

We are still left with one doubt, however, after this journey, in which we are closely guided by Foucault's interpretation: did Alcibiades really change radically to the point of sincerely assuming the strength of the dialectic of love? And, in relation to Socrates, would he have effectively become the formative master in search of truth, to the point of accepting Alcibiades as he is and, from such acceptance, effectively begin the formative process of his disciple? In short, for there to effectively be a formative dialectic of love, wouldn't each one have to have moved away from the exclusivity of his point of view? Alcibiades, from his dogmatic sleep restricted to individual corporeal beauty, and Socrates, from his obsessive contemplation of beauty itself? This questioning leads us to re-read not only Foucault's to some extent generous interpretation of Plato's *Banquet*, but also the Platonic dialogue itself. To carry these questions forward would imply wondering, among other things, what exactly Socrates' response would have been at the end of the *Banquet* if he had continued to dialogue directly with Alcibiades. However, of one thing we are sure - and this opens the possibility for a historicized interpretation of the *Banquet* and, with it, an idea of human formation that we try to defend here - the shrill and unruly entrance of Alcibiades into the symposium promoted by Agathon and narrated by Plato served, at least, to pull Socrates out of the intelligible world and bring him back to the sensitive world (GOLDSCHMIDT, 2002, p. 220).

At any rate, Plato sketches, embryonically, the foundations of a critical educational theory, whose strength needs to be maintained and updated under several aspects. The first one characterizes the tireless search for human self-government as a condition for free participation in the public sphere. Plato masterfully teaches us that this close link between self-government and the government of others is only possible by overcoming the individualistic (narcissistic) point of view and including the other based on a broader perspective, arising from the question of the beautiful in itself. In these days, marked by the radicalization of individualistic projects and by the strong effort to privatize and scrap all dimensions of the democratic public sphere, we need more than ever to broaden our spirit and try to see other people, society, and the world from plural, broader perspectives, because the strengthening of democracy depends on a broadened spirit, which is formed by the process of estrangement that makes us leave our restricted world and put ourselves in the place of the other. Don't we need today, even more, that estrangement caused by the formative Eros, which makes us twist and turn with more intensity than the lethal effect of a poisonous viper?

Second, the force of the formative Eros, when it reaches the realm of the dialectic of love, still remains current in its demand for permanent critical self-examination. The formative power of Eros rests on the human disposition of openness to sit side by side and, in the form of a symposium, first listen attentively to what the other has to say and, only after having followed him in the minutiae of his speech, formulate the critical judgment, accepting from the partner what needs to be maintained and distancing from him what becomes unacceptable. The ancient Greek symposium, as a possibility of human dialogue, was historically updated, assuming new and different forms of cultural expression, involving a much wider circle of human beings, such as children, blacks and women, previously excluded from the banquet wheel. Precisely because of this, it remains a great challenge to re-update the unusual

formative experience[8] made possible by the ancient symposium as a space for human dialogue. Thus, Agathon, when organizing the feast, could not foresee in advance that Socrates would expose his dialectic of love through the discursive intervention of the priestess Diotima. Nor could the beautiful and victorious young poet have previously imagined the thundering irruption of the drunken Alcibiades and, even less so, his enamored account of Socrates and his revelation of the transformations he had undergone in listening attentively to him on many previous occasions. We may ask ourselves, in these days of brutal and increasing barbarization of human and social life, how much more do we need the dialectic of love revealed by the priestess or accounts of profound formative transformations, such as that of Alcibiades?

Finally, the great actuality of the Platonic dialectic of love rests, unequivocally, on the adequate understanding of the complementary and unavoidable character of the ethical relationship between educator and student, provoking the transformation of both into active subjects of the teaching-learning relationship: the educator can only fulfill his teaching role when he is willing to assume the humble condition of putting himself in the position of the student, or, at least, of making an effort to see the formative process through the viewpoint of one who needs to appropriate something that he lacks and that, for this reason, is completely foreign to him. Without the educator himself doing the process of estrangement, discovering the very lack that constitutes him, he cannot bring the stranger to his pupil. On the other hand, the student himself can only fulfill his role as a learner if he longs for the condition of a teacher, because this is what becomes an erotic force, creating the conditions for him, the student, to appropriate what is strange to him. In today's world, marked by the conveniences of digital technology and the facilitations provided by active methodologies, don't we need, even more, the dialectic of love that makes possible the understanding of the ethical-formative complementarity that constitutes the genuine relationship between lovers of knowledge? But why does human formation need to insist on such understanding? Because it is at the origin of moral self-government, which is an indispensable condition for free and democratic deliberation in the public sphere.

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[8] This aspect of the unexpected that appears in the Greek symposium as a cultural expression, and specifically in Plato's *Banquet*, is characteristic of human action and the educational act. For an investigation of the importance of uncontrolled events for understanding the human condition, see Martha Nussbaum's (2005) study *The Knowledge of Love*.

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