

# **The pedagogical face of Eros**

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## **Abstract**

*The present work seeks to uncover the pedagogical face of Eros. As a starting point, there is the fact that the figure of the educator/teacher is commonly represented by someone whose occupation does not elicit desires of any kind. It is not unusual to see literary representations and televised or cinema images in which the teacher appears comically as a caricature that talks continuously and monotonically to pupils whose countenances oscillate between boredom and scorn. But what is truly frightening is that, more and more, the images that show up in the discourse of the younger generations, in an attempt to oppose the caricature just mentioned, associate the figure of the teacher to that of a presenter of a talk show: theatrical, amusing, an expert in cathartic group dynamics, with no content and equally caricatured. Seeking to steer clear of both caricatures and to reflect upon the specific genre of the pedagogical “libido” – understood as spiritual force or strength for the moral, intellectual and bodily progress – the text rescues the illustrative power of the myth, thinks about the power of the imaginary in the constitution of model parameters for education and for the exercise of teaching (to this end it proposes Socratic, sophistic and scholastic notes with emphasis on language) and points to the importance of this discussion in view of the problems that populate the contemporary educational spheres.*

## **Keywords**

*Eros – Education – Language.*

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In his “Taboos on the Teaching Profession”, Adorno (1995) highlights the subjective or unconscious motivations for the aversion to teaching, and how the collective crystallization of representations guided by psychological and social preconceptions turns into a real force that contributes to intensify the current Education crisis. Among the cited representations, the figure of the teacher as someone devoid of any erotic dimension suggests a reflection that seeks to recover, at some point in time, the specifically pedagogical Eros as one of the matrices of the constitution of the educator which, albeit not prevalent in history, coexists with the preconceptions inside the imaginary woven around its figure.

The present work is, above all, an affirmative discourse on the act of educating and on who educates. It seeks to translate the mastership and the figure of the master into their poetry, and chooses the Greek myth of Eros as an inspiration. The intent is that of revealing the illustrative potential of the myth, in the exemplary sense of an atemporal beauty to be beheld in connection with the theme under study. However, if a myth is to inspire that which is permanent in the classic action of teaching, one has to signify it within the contemporary landscape; hence the necessity of reflecting the elements of the transitory, of the ephemeral or of the contingent. One has, therefore, to find a way of expressing the movement of keeping and transforming the classic action of teaching. And so, it is not the case here of defending a pure and simple reediting of the mastership past as seen in its poetic and ideal aspect, but of establishing, beyond that, “[...] creative encounters with the past” (Berman, 1986, p. 315), in the sense of offering elements for the necessary dialogue between the educator and his own time. Perhaps Baudelaire’s words are opportune to express this tension between past and present when searching for something of beauty:

The beautiful is constituted by an eternal, unchangeable element whose quantity is

exceedingly difficult to ascertain, and by a relative, circumstantial element which will be, if we like, successively or jointly, the epoch, the fashion, the morals, the standing. Without this second element, which is like the pleasant, pulsing wrapping, the appetizer before the divine nectar, the first element would be indigestible, insipid, unadapted and unfit to human nature. I challenge anyone to find one example of beauty that does not have these two elements. (p. 10)

Even considering the binary eternal/ephemeral in the composition of all beauty, there remains a question to Baudelaire: would the first element really be so indigestible and insipid?

### **Why the myth**

In Eliade (1992) the myth tells a sacred history, a primordial event that took place at the beginning of time, played by the civilizing gods and heroes. It is a narrative that has as its object the *creation*, how something was done and came to be: “Every myth shows how a given reality came to be, be it the total reality or Cosmos, or just a fragment: an island, a vegetable species, a *human institution*” (p. 82; our emphasis). Within this beginning of everything, the exemplary models were established to serve as parameters for human actions, thence deriving of the functions of the myth: “The most important function of the myth is, therefore, to “fix” the exemplary models of all rites and of all significant human activities: feeding, sexuality, work, *education* etc” (p. 82; our emphasis). The author continues:

Behaving as a wholly responsible human being, man imitates the exemplary gestures of the gods, repeats their actions, either in a simple physiological function such as feeding, or in social, economic, cultural, military or any other activity. (p. 82; our emphasis)

This kind of “spiritual history of the world” (Grimal, 1987, p. 7), full of relations

between the real and the imaginary, signals to the eternal struggle between Logos and Mythos, between reason and fantasy. Myth is commonly associated to a pre-scientific way of searching for origins and causations, and it is seldom understood as a dimension of the truth, albeit not identified with the scientific truth. On this subject, Ricoeur (1988), writing about the philosophical interpretation of myth, proposes the following question: “The question is ultimately to know if scientific truth is the whole truth, or if something is said by myth that could not be said in any other way” (p. 11).

The signifying intention of myth, according to Ricoeur (1988), can be classified into figurative – or representative – paradigmatic, and affective.

The first of these, the figurative or representative, consists in the function of establishing models for action; the second, the paradigmatic, deals with the cohesion between the narration of the origins and of the present time, since myth can be reenacted in rite; and the third, the affective, is linked to essentially subjective factors, having the ability “[...] of creating that which we can call the mythical-poetical nucleus of human existence” (Ricoeur, 1988, p. 29).

The joint meaning of these three intentions is described by the author in the following terms:

In this sense it can be said that the myths of origin have themselves a sapiencial dimension, for to understand how things began is to know what they now mean, and what future they continue to afford man. (1988, p. 29)

The same author, borrowing from Jean-Paul Audet, expresses a deeper meaning of myth: “[...] a ‘totalizing appropriation’ of the entire legacy of a community” (1988, p. 30).

In what concerns Education, this finds application both in archaic societies that bestow upon the shaman the job of forming men, and in those that later found themselves

in the midst of a “[...] process of progressive rationalization of the religious concept of the world implicit in the myths” (Jaeger, 1995, p. 192), such as the Greek society. Still, it cannot be said that the oral tradition and the literary fruits inspired by the myths, and adequate to their time, did not fulfill their signifying intentions.

### **The myth of Eros and its pedagogical meaning**

To begin with, it is worth recalling, following the version offered in the *Symposium* (Plato, 1971) – which by its beauty and meaning could well be compared to a *delicacy* – the circumstances of Eros’ birth and his parentage.

Eros is born at a party where the gods celebrate the birth of Aphrodite. His bond to the goddess of love makes him the companion and servant of Beauty. Gestated on that day, he is son to Penia (Poverty) and Poros (Plenty). Because of his provenance, Eros is double. From his mother he inherits the need, the lack and the search. From the father, the power or possibility to slake hunger, to fulfill the need, to plot strategies to satisfy his needs and desires. However, such satisfaction, which is never permanent but always temporary, burdens Eros with a fate: that of living the joy of a quenched hunger, of a craving allayed, of a ludic pleasure afforded by a successful strategy, only to subsequently die, having to feel and resume it all to live again. Hence his destiny as a rover (Pessanha *apud* Civita, 1973).

What does the myth suggest in a philosophical perspective? Much, undoubtedly. Starting with the image of Eros as an astute hunter of knowledge. He knows he is not wise (which in itself is a sign of wisdom), but he wishes and tries hard to know. Etymologically, *eros* comes from the Greek verb *érasthai*, meaning *to desire intensely*. As a son to minor entities, Eros is not properly a God, but an unappeased or restless force or energy, a need in search of plenitude, a subject looking for an object (Brandão, 1993), believing and

disbelieving its existence, and his own ability to find it. This kind of *libido* is, in these terms, understood as spiritual force or energy for the moral, intellectual and sensible progress. And to what extent does Eros hint at the interlacing of philosophy and pedagogy?

In the *Theogony* (Hesiod, 1995), Eros appears as the link, mediator or intermediate. Bonding or linking one thing to another, always between two points, intermediating relations and giving cohesion to the Cosmos. Under the perspective of a rationalist philosophy it is that which tends to link or integrate everything, so as to know. While it operates through relationships and ties, it hovers over the plane of ideas and human relations. This is what Platonic philosophy reminds us of by attributing to Eros the function of “[...] structuring the path that allows human intellect to ascend to the plane of ideas [...]” (Pessanha *apud* Civita, 1973, p. 35). Rational work, the royal road to such plane, establishes discursive reason as the intermediate, for the uses of such philosophy, between the sensible plane and the intelligible plane. Eros is, therefore, language.

According to Pessanha (*apud* Civita, 1973), the issue of the eroticism in the conception of the ancient Greeks is fundamental to understand the Platonic concept of love. More than sexual choices, the Greeks are interested in the quality of such relationships. If spiced by temperance, the chances are increased of accomplishing the passage from Erotica (relative to the love for young men) to Philosophy (relative to the love for truth/*philia*). Under the Platonic perspective of ascesis, one has to go beyond the horizontal plane of the affective relationships with people, to the vertical plane of the affective-intellectual relation between subjects and truth.

The three dialogues dedicated by Plato to the theme of love – *Lysis* (*apud* Pessanha, 1995), *Symposium* (Jaeger, 1971) and *Phaedrus* (*idem*) – are developed on the basis of two axes of the love experience.

In *Lysis*, such axes appear as opposition: to the passional, enslaving, overwhelming love,

associated to the immediate and the sensible, there stands the love based on learning, on knowledge, love that frees. Here, Socrates emerges as the ideal lover who, by applying his teaching seduction, undertakes with his disciples a *hunt upwards*. *Lysis* also suggests the figure of the ideal loved one: one who, by candidness and docility, yields to the teaching seduction, for the Eros that inhabits him (that of a pupil) knows that it needs to learn and wait.

In the *Symposium*, after being revered as theogonic and cosmogonic principle by Phaedrus, as universal force of attraction of the same by Pausanias and Eryximachus, as impulse to search for totality by Aristophanes, as the younger, more beautiful and happier god that rules over the surface relationships without depth or engagement with the tragic by Agathon, Eros appears in the voice of Diotima-Socrates as *daimon*, that is, as intermediate between men and the gods. In his pedagogical facet he changes into a guiding genie, a kind of inner voice that speaks to man, guides or advises him. It is here the mediator, with the function of interpreting and transmitting: it is like the language that is woven in the verticality, in the human/divine relationship. The final contemplation of all beauty is born out of an *erotic ascesis* guided by him.

Always at the midpoint between parts, he is the god that presides over human relations, seeking harmony:

Additionally, Eros also represents the ‘*complexio oppositorum*’, the union of opposites. Love is the fundamental impulse of being, the ‘*libido*’ that propels all existence to realize itself in action. It is him that actualizes the virtualities of being, but this passage to act only takes place from the contact with the ‘other’, through a series of material, spiritual and sensible exchanges, which inevitably bring about clashes and commotions. Eros attempts to overcome these antagonisms, assimilating different and contrary forces, integrating them into a single unit. (BRANDÃO, 1993, p. 189)

His situation as the cause of hunger and his power of congregating people and ideas, choosing, in the human plane, language as one of the arrows sent by his bow, has much to suggest the art of teaching. It is, thus, the metaphor of language as arrow sent by Eros' bow that I intend to examine henceforth.

Let us first recall the relation of Eros to the Muses.

When analyzing the *Theogony*, Torrano (1995) writes about the functions of the Muses:

The goddesses sing in the Olympus for Zeus' delight the same song that the bard servant of the Muses, by the latter's bequest, sings, not just for the delight of the listeners – but also for the sustenance of life, for the vivifying communion with the Divine, for the *transmission of Knowledge*, and so that one can be given a vision of the totality of Being. (p. 95, our emphasis)

For being accompanied by the Muses, the bards are favored by Mnemosyne, who represents the power of spirit over instantaneous matter, and is the foundation of all intelligence. Mnemosyne also means universal memory, the remembering that defies Chronos (the Time) – who devours all: beings, moments, destinies, without any attachment to what has passed, – and the struggle to preserve the lucid matter over which it rules.

However, it is not enough that the song remembers; it must seduce by the word spoken: “The names of the Muses must first be pronounced, and the Muses must present themselves as the numinous force of the sung words that they are, and then the song will show itself in its allure” (Torrano, 1995, p. 21).

The forces that animate the seduction exerted by the Muses in the *Theogony* are thus translated, still by Torrano (1995):

As soon as they are born, the Muses establish the chorus and the feast, accompanied by the Graces (Charites) and

Desire (Himerus). The latter also takes part in Aphrodite's retinue, where he is the equal of Eros (v. 201). The art of the Muses is not just persuasion [...], but the seduction, the lure of beauty and sensual appeal. They are followed by Desire, which they arouse, and his companion Eros storms the listeners through the power of their voice, which by Eros' presence is a 'loving' [...] and 'lovable' voice [...]. (p. 33)

Under the auspices of Mnemosyne, kings and poets are architects of the word. Take the verses of the *Theogony*: “For it is through the Muses and far-shooting Apollo that there are singers and harpers upon the earth; but princes are of Zeus, and happy is he whom the Muses love: sweet flows speech from his mouth” (v. 95).

The use of the word requires specialization and qualification, and that is what distinguishes kings and poets from the rest. To be listened they need to seduce, and when they do, they become authorities. In the words of Torrano (1995): “[...] the authority of both resides in the seduction and fascination they exert through the Word upon their entourage” (p. 37). Now, recalling the past, transmitting knowledge in a seductive way, and arising desire towards knowledge are, undoubtedly, classic attributes of teaching. And in this respect, even though buried under its current heathen identity, there is something sacred in its exercise. Not just in mythical narratives, but also in the long history that testifies the configuration of the most varied types of mastering, the power of the word has never been overlooked. From its inception, we witness the polyphony of voices that purport to be educative and teaching. Let us dwell a little longer upon the myths.

The association between Muses and bards and the figure of the master indicates that both memory and seduction are vital for the exercise of certain kind of teaching.

The relationship between bard and master can be suitably illustrated by the character of Orpheus.

When discussing the Greek-Roman religion of Dionysus (Bacchus) and the cult of Orpheus, Henderson (1964) says that “Orpheus must have been a real character – a singer, prophet and teacher – who was martyred, and whose tomb became a sanctuary” (p. 141).

Both the cults of Dionysus and those of Orpheus had the characteristic of initiation to the mysteries. These cults eventually created symbols associated to a kind of godlike man who, among other competences, had an intimate understanding of the animal and vegetable world, whose secrets the initiated saw unveiled by the initiatory action of the master.

Orpheus dominates the art of music and uses it to charm and seduce. It was with such power that he went down to the underworld to rescue his beloved Eurydice, and also ventured the expedition with the Argonauts in search of the Golden Fleece. In this expedition, it was Orpheus’ task to comfort heroes and seamen with his sweet chant. Strumming his lyre, it is he who delivers them from the dangers of another song, of deathly beauty: the sirens’ song; it is he who affords the rowers a serene rhythm for the journey; he who delights the ears of the gods that peer from behind the clouds.

The ability to enchant can also be observed in Ulysses during his journey home to Ithaca (Homer’s *Odyssey*). By the request of the king of the Phaeacians, Ulysses tells his stories before a rapt and dazzled audience: the battle with the Cyclopes; the Lotus-Eaters; the scheme he devised to escape from Polyphemus the Cyclops; the visit to Aeolus; how he arrived to Telepylos; on Circe’s machinations, and how he navigated to Hades’ home; how he avoided succumbing to the sirens’ singing; how he reached the moving rocks and the hideous Charybdis and Scylla; about how his companions slaughtered the sun-god’s cattle and the ensuing tragedy; how he arrived alone to the Ogygian island and became the prisoner-lover of the nymph Calypso; and, lastly, his passage through the land of the Phaeacians, who sent him back to Ithaca full of gifts, bronze, gold and fine cloths.

His quality as narrator makes of Ulysses

a proper master. Although at many points in the narrative the orator’s staff may be handed over to other characters (elders and other nobles), during the assemblies and meetings it is Ulysses who artfully masters the word. Athena, his protector, describes him as an “unbeatable plotter”, an “indefatigable fabulist” and, at the same time, as an “astute cheater” (Homer, 1992, p. 151), suggesting the ambiguity of the word when it comes to say the truth.

As for that, the listener must have developed some of the cunning Ulysses demonstrated occupying not the place of narrator, but that of listener, when he passed through that bit of ocean inhabited by the sirens. The beauty of the sirens’ song is deadly, but Ulysses longs for it and, at the same time, does not wish to pay for such delight with his own life. So, he has the ears of his rowers covered with wax so that they will hear nothing and continue to row during the perilous passage, while he asks to be tied to the ship’s mast, but with his ears unimpeded. By such device Ulysses manages to listen to and enjoy the beauty of the singing without succumbing to it.

From this passage, which seen from the pedagogical viewpoint evokes the critical spirit of the listener and underlines how illusory the sensation of power experienced by the narrator can be, let us move on to other voices, now historical, that purport to be educational and teaching. We start with Socrates.

In the Platonic dialogues the rational web that is patiently woven by Socrates around his interlocutor creates in the latter an *illusion of authorship*. In other words, that which is the fruit of the exercise of a guided reason appears as the result of moves made by the interlocutor. That is how Socrates says that it is his interlocutor who is saying something or makes him say what he has in mind. In fact, the interlocutor’s chances are minimal. In this sense, it is worth questioning the latter’s autonomy of thought, and whether there would not exist detours other than those dictated by the rational stunts of the master. At any rate, it should be kept in mind that the artifice used yields provisional conclusions, leaving the questions

vexingly open. The continuously provisional character of the Socratic language is its attractive component, although the latter is applied in the search for the immutable or eternal. In any case, it is certainly its aporetic form that signals to the intention of a shared quest, in which master and disciple experience different eroticisms: the former characterized by the play of strategic guidance; the latter felt as a result of the demand for leaving the habit and settled ways in the name of the wish to go beyond.

Whilst, in Socrates, language excludes and does not exclude absolute truth – for if it just excluded it the drive for the search would be dead – it condemns the kind of adulation that the spoken language can easily incorporate. Nor can it be understood in Socrates as an artifice to delude.

Socrates does not say what pleases, but what needs to be said to make men operate in themselves the required transformations. So much so that, in the *Apology*, when the judges sentence him to death, the philosopher says: “[...] the deficiency which led to my conviction was not of words – certainly not. But I had not the boldness or impudence or inclination to address you as you would have liked me to do, weeping and wailing and lamenting, and saying and doing many things which you have been accustomed to hear from others, and which, as I maintain, are unworthy of me” (Plato, 1993, p. 96).

In the *Phaedrus*, his first discourse on Eros, Socrates warns the young man after whom the dialogue is entitled about the risk of the loved one, seduced by the lover, being deprived of his intelligence and separated from the *divine philosophy*. These words indicate another detrimental facet language can acquire when exercised after the rules of rhetoric, after adulation and promise of protection under the command of the selfish desire and lust of the devotee. Further on, Socrates states: “There are some sort of animals, such as flatterers, who are dangerous and mischievous enough, and yet nature has mingled a temporary pleasure and grace in their composition (Plato, 1971, p.

214). Fascination of the flattery, fascination of the truth, it is each one’s choice.

Socrates proposes to fascinate with the search of the truth, even if the result is the doubt. His power of seduction is metaphorized, here and there, by those who submit to his questioning. In the *Meno*, it is compared to a tremelga (a flat torpedo fish), and in the *Symposium* Alcibiades associates it to the busts of Silenus, to Marsyas the satyr, and to the siren, symbols that translate to him the figure of Socrates.

In the metaphor of the tremelga, Socrates is thus referred to by Meno:

O Socrates, I used to be told, before I knew you, that you were always doubting yourself and making others doubt; and now you are casting your spells over me, and I am simply getting bewitched and enchanted, and am at my wits’ end. And if I may venture to make a jest upon you, you seem to me both in your appearance and in your power over others to be very like the flat torpedo fish, who torpifies those who come near him and touch him, as you have now torpified me, I think. (Plato, 1971, p. 83)

When touched, this fish produces electric discharges, stupefying whoever touches it. Meno, by *touching* Socrates, finds himself bewitched by doubt. Note that Socrates admits the comparison if the tremelga, when stupefying others, also stupefies itself, which gives him some charm, well known as his studied modesty.

The enchantment of the doubt is here seen as something good. After questioning Meno’s slave, Socrates asks about the effects of language: “If we have made him doubt, and given him the ‘torpedo’s shock’, have we done him any harm?” (p. 90). No. The slave is in doubt. He knows that he does not know, and is bewitched by the desire to know.

In the *Symposium*, Alcibiades, when praising Socrates, compares the philosopher to the busts of Silenus, which gave shape to

cabinets and kept rich and beautiful things: ugly on the outside, and beautiful, in the sense of wise, on the inside. Apparently, his discourses will border the ridicule and comical, but:

[...] but he who opens the bust and sees what is within will find that they are the only words which have a meaning in them, and also the most divine, abounding in fair images of virtue, and of the widest comprehension, or rather extending to the whole duty of a good and honourable man. (Plato, 1971, p. 187-188)

Next, in another comparison, Socrates is related to the satyr and flute-player Marsyas. Knower of a unique and divine music: "He indeed with instruments used to charm the souls of men by the power of his breath [...]" (p. 179). Alcibiades tells Socrates: "But you produce the same effect with your words only, and do not require the flute: that is the difference between you and him." (p. 179).

Alcibiades speaks warmly about the impact Socrates' discourses had on him. They disturbed his spirit in such way that he succumbed to them. As the speaker of irresistible discourses, Socrates is now symbolized by the sirens: "[...] I am conscious that if I did not shut my ears against him, and fly as from the voice of the siren, my fate would be like that of others, - he would transfix me, and I should grow old sitting at his feet" (p. 180). Tormented by his own faults and sins, Alcibiades feels stunned by Socrates' words and, almost in a wail, says: "For I have been bitten by a more than viper's tooth; [...] more violent in ingenuous youth than any serpent's tooth, the pang of philosophy [...]" (p. 182).

However, Alcibiades does not want asceticism. The passion he feels for Socrates consumes him and does not ask for procrastination or conversion. Foremost, there is the urgency of here and now, chained to the immediate and to the sensible. Arriving drunk at the Symposium, elicits the irrational forces of the other side of

love; that which, instead of climbing, plunges into the darkness of unreciprocated passion-love and thereby moves away from the loving teaching of Socratic-Platonic mold.

The *Phaedrus* returns to the two axes of the construction of the loving experience: love as desiring the better, and love without self-control, characteristic of immoderate souls.

In this same dialogue, when examining the conditions for the acquisition of the art of rhetoric – provisionally admitted as a force that shapes the soul, as long as using legitimate arguments and discourses –, Socrates unveils with authority the mechanisms implicit in the art of seducing the souls through the use of rhetoric.

Socrates says that "Oratory is the art of enchanting the soul [...]" (p. 257). However, souls are not all the same. Quite the opposite, they are diverse and the orator has to learn all the forms under which such diversity is present. Once known, the orator shall distinguish discourses adequate to each one of them, so as to persuade them. Souls let themselves be carried away by the discourse that is dear to them: it is up to the good orator to find it out and pronounce it, so as to convince. There is also, he continues, the subtlety of detecting the moment and deciding on the most appropriate argument; of distinguishing occasions and evaluating what is worth doing: to silence or to speak; of knowing what form of discourse to employ: concise or verbose, spiced with dramatic appeals and the transport of passion.

Only then, according to Socrates, the orator is ready to speak in public, write or give lessons. Only then will he be *master of his art*.

And here the Socratic Eros gives way to the Eros of the sophists, also masters of the words. A different facet of the pedagogical Eros. That which is revealed in the promise the master makes to the disciple of teaching him something. In a discourse-monologue, artifact of language, that invites the reason and feelings of others to an adventure of the thinking, without prejudices or reserve as to the kinds of knowledge. In a speech that makes the internal powers stir

silently. And, of course, in a discourse that may also be full of traps, given its twists.

But let us leave the windings of the sophists for a moment and let us pay attention to the type of discoursing Eros inaugurated by them, and which constitute a shaping force for the pedagogy that was built after the mold of tradition. Itinerant masters of rhetoric and oratory, they attracted rulers, politicians and citizens in general with the brilliance of their teachings, their techniques and skills, so necessary to the participation in the Athenian democracy. However, what calls attention, considering the theme proposed here, is the impression of a *logos* also itinerant, characteristic of the sophists. Artists or technicians of the argumentative discourse exhibit an almost ludic behavior of juggling with words, in an abstract movement of for and against (be it for, secretly, anticipate possible objections or for, publicly, emphasize and value the latent contradictions of common beliefs), in search of consensus or convergence of interests. Here emerges, in the strategic sense, a verbal Eros of the martial type which in essence wishes to metamorphose into that Eros, already described by Brandão (1993), which, amidst material, spiritual and sensible exchanges, shocks and commotions, pursues the union of the opposites and the joy of unity.

For this reason, there is no way of effecting a drastic opposition between discourses and dialogue in the sophist pedagogy. Although this relation does not have the verticalizing intention of the Platonic dialogues, it presents itself as an equally relevant modality of human formation. It is true that the discourse, adorned by grammatical and poetic flowerings (images, metaphors and figures of speech as stylistic resources, of which Plato was himself a master), is the central element of the sophist seduction. Of a persuasive type, it believes itself capable of bringing about a second, more beautiful, nature, sprung from language.

The pedagogical practice that was traditionally erected by the discourse has

suffered severe criticism from the modern and contemporary trends. It is not unusual to witness literary representations and cinematographic images in which the teacher appears comically as a caricature that speaks, continuously and monotonously, to pupils whose countenances oscillate between boredom and scorn.

If, however, we recover the original nucleus of the educational theories that have the discourse as their main ally, this point of view may be relativized. We can find, even in those pedagogical models that incarnate the more canonical in terms of educative traditional, the discursive kind of Eros.

In a brief work entitled *De Magistro* – one of the questions disputed about the truth, that of number eleven –, Thomas Aquinas (2000), when discussing the nature of teaching, says that the natural forms are preexisting in matter as potential (pupil) and are led to act by an close extrinsic agent (teacher). The active potential, as preexisting given in the educated, has two forms of acquiring knowledge (the act): through discovery, when reason by itself reaches the knowledge, and through teaching, when reason receives outside help to reach it. In the case of teaching, the interaction between the intrinsic agent (nature) and the extrinsic agent (art) is a premise to define the very idea of education: to educe knowledge into act from potential. The teacher, through language, shows or displays signals so that the pupil himself transforms the potential into act (the state of knowing proper). To better illustrate this process, Aquinas resorts to a clever analogy between the cure and the act of acquiring knowledge. Explaining: the cure may be the consequence of the action of the vary nature of the patient (intrinsic agent) or of the action of this same nature helped by the doctor who prescribes the right medicine (extrinsic agent); likewise, the knowledge acquired by the movement of natural reason that alone completes it – and in this case we have the discovery – can also be acquired by this same movement of the natural reason, only now helped/guided by an

external agent (the master), and then we have teaching. Therefore, in its original nucleus, the educational theory of the Aquinian philosopher is far from a mechanical transmission deprived of pedagogical Eros, represented by a passive pupil that listens and an active teacher that speaks. On the contrary, “the teacher must guide the pupil to the knowledge the latter ignored, following the path traveled by someone that reaches by himself the discovery of what he did not know” (2000, p. 32). The discourse of the teacher is, therefore, an invitation and, once accepted, perhaps the more active element is the pupil.

This analogy seems to establish the beginnings of a discussion that continues to this day around the specific nature of teaching and which, in Aquinas, differs from the nature of discovery and from that, espoused (so long before) by St. Augustine, which effects an opposition between the interior and the exterior, the former a kind of reservoir of truths ultimately revealed by divine illumination. The pedagogical Eros in Aquinas is of the teaching type, that which through meticulously arranged signals open the way along which thought may (or may not) pass. That is how the philosopher defends the very possibility of one man teaching another.

We must draw attention to the fact that such path, in one of its possibilities, is not linear. It appears as meanders and alternatives of theses, objections, counter-objections, solutions and answers. It is the structure of the *quaestio disputata*, a critical examination of the great ideas and essence of medieval university. In it, one vies for the truth on a given theme, considering the voices opposing the position that will be defined by the author. A *determinatio* about the question is, thus, consequence of a confrontation of ideas: attractive for some; tedious and sterile for others.

At any rate, be it for the search of truth, founded on the metaphysical belief in its

existence, be it for rhetoric or discourse, the fact is that the seduction through language shall always involve the capture of the soul. As in love, it is possible that in the philosophical and pedagogical fields the seduction is exercised delicately, surreptitiously, creating the passionate impulse of the soul for knowledge. Referring to Eros' agility, Aghaton says in the *Symposium*: “[...] for if he were hard and without flexure he could not enfold all things, or wind his way into and out of every soul of man undiscovered.” (1971, p. 154)

In the ancient world, and of necessity in the contemporary world, the erotic force of language in ideal terms seems to be surrounded by this lightness that spreads through words sweet as honey. Socrates himself, when he decides to make amends to Eros, says in the *Phaedrus*: “[...] to wash the brine out of my ears with water from the spring [...]” (1971, p. 221).

Not just in the times of Socrates, but also today, ears are full of brine. In terms of human formation, both in spaces wide as in restricted, we are hassled by all sort of violence of the language – a “what this language wants and can do” in its dangerous and worrying version. A violence that is practiced with discourses aimed at the collective fates in the sphere of politics, of market, of religion, and of cultural values in general, as those that circulate inside the homes, schools and leisure spaces with the stereos continuously on (and preferably at top volume). The Eros of the pedagogical type does not care for much noise. It steers clear of any and all kind of violence. In the *Symposium*, Agathon compares it to the Goddess Ate, that of tender feet that do not step on ground, but on the heads of men (Plato, 1983). To be touched by Eros, men need to be gentle, for it is on these that Eros consents to step and reside. More than ever, in every modality of social practice, the contemporary world claims for delicateness and suavity.

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