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## Was Socrates educated by Alcibiades?<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** The best-known historical character who is connected to Socratic education is Alcibiades. The link between this pedagogical relationship and the ancient notion of παιδεία can be found in almost every author of Σωκρατικοὶ λόγοι. Scholars of ancient philosophy concur that all Socratic works on Alcibiades were meant as a unified response of sorts, on the part of Socrates' circle, to Polycrates' *Accusation*, with the objective of demonstrating Socrates' innocence. There would seem to be no reason to doubt Socrates' positive effect on Alcibiades. On the other hand, we cannot question the Alcibiades' undeniable negative side of Alcibiades. The aim of this paper is to answer a controversial question: how could Socrates the philosopher have been educated by the arrogant Alcibiades? Whereas most contemporary scholars consider Alcibiades solely as a student of Socrates (as *receiving* a Socratic education), we approach the matter from the other way around: we wish to establish the extent to which Alcibiades acted on Socrates, in a certain sense, thus educating him (even if unintentionally). In our paper, we focus on Aeschines' and Plato's portrayals of Alcibiades.

**KEY-WORDS:** Aeschines, Plato, Love, Alcibiades, *Paideia*, Archaic *Erôs*, Socratic *Erôs*

The pedagogical and therapeutic effects<sup>2</sup> of Socrates' ἐρωτική τέχνη are favourite topics of the interpretative literature and have been increasingly explored by

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scholars both in Slovakia<sup>3</sup> and abroad.<sup>4</sup> Interest in the art of Socratic therapy as it is found in Plato and other Socratic writers (such as Antisthenes, Xenophon and Aeschines) began to grow in proportion to the increasing popularity of Michel Foucault's philosophy. It was Foucault<sup>5</sup> who, in his last lectures, focused on the meaning of ἄσκησις and self-knowledge in terms of ἐπιμέλεια ἑαυτοῦ, as outlined in ancient Greek philosophy, thus opening up a completely new interpretative framework. In this framework, Socrates is considered an outstanding therapist who is able, by means of his specific obstetric art and Socratic love, to lead his pupils (or patients) to become ethically more excellent. An essential part of this approach to excellence (ἀρετή) is knowledge of one's self, or observance of the sacred Delphic maxim γνῶθι σεαυτόν.

The best-known literary and historical character who is connected (in both positive and negative ways) to Socratic education is Alcibiades. The link between this pedagogical relationship and the ancient notion of παιδεία can be found in almost every author of Σωκρατικοὶ λόγοι. We are familiar with Alcibiades from Aeschines, Antisthenes, Euclid,<sup>6</sup> Phaedo,<sup>7</sup> Xenophon and – probably his best-preserved portrayal – Plato. Scholars of ancient philosophy concur that all Socratic works on Alcibiades were meant as a unified response of sorts, on the part of Socrates' circle, to Polycrates' *Accusation*, with the objective of demonstrating Socrates' innocence. On this picture, Alcibiades' drawbacks were not brought about by his being educated by Socrates. Instead, the contrary is true: his keeping close company with Socrates in fact suppressed his faults, and his Socratic education had an overwhelmingly positive effect on the young aristocrat.<sup>8</sup>

There would seem to be no reason to doubt Socrates' positive effect on Alcibiades (at least as witnessed by the Socratic circle). On the other hand, we cannot question the notorious debauchery and depravity of the famous member of the Alcmaeoid family. Both Plutarch<sup>9</sup> and Cornelius Nepus observe that no one in Athens surpassed him in either virtue or vice (*nihil illo fuisse excellentius vel in vitiis vel in virtutibus*)<sup>10</sup>. Plato describes Alcibiades' character in a negative light, pointing out in particular his haughtiness and arrogance (ὑπερφρονέω)<sup>11</sup>. Xenophon depicts the young man as being incapable of self-control (ἀκρατέστατος) and as being distinguished by his insolence (ὑβριστότατος)<sup>12</sup>.

Despite Alcibiades' undeniable negative side, we will suggest that the character Alcibiades, as depicted by various Socratic writers, plays an important role in Socratic *paideia*. The aim of this paper is to answer a controversial question: how could Socrates the philosopher have been educated by the arrogant Alcibiades? Whereas

<sup>2</sup> The core of Socratic pedagogy is not a handing over of factual pieces of knowledge but a therapy that aims to lead the pupil to a good life.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Suvák (2014, 2017, 2016, 2017); Wollner (2010); Flachbartová (2014, 2016) and Flachbartová, Sisáková, Suvák (2016).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Nehamas (2000) and Sellars (2009).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Foucault (2002, 2008). For employment of the Foucauldian interpretative framework in reading Aeschines, see e.g. Lampe (2015) 61–81. P. Hadot views ancient philosophy as a therapeutic art; see Hadot (1987). On this topic, see also Zvarík (2018).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. DL II. 108.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. III A 8 SSR and DL II. 105.

<sup>8</sup> Kalaš –Suvák (2013) 473 and Jirsa (2007) 279–292.

<sup>9</sup> Plutarch, *Alc.* 23.

<sup>10</sup> Nepus, *Alc.* 1, cf. Plato, *Hipp. Min.* 369b, especially the remark that a man can be both truthful and a liar at the same time.

<sup>11</sup> Plato, *Alc.* I 104a.

<sup>12</sup> Xenophon, *Mem.* I. 2. 12, cf. Ael. Aristid., *De quatt.* 575.

most contemporary scholars consider Alcibiades solely as a student of Socrates (as *receiving* a Socratic education), we approach the matter from the other way around: we wish to establish the extent to which Alcibiades acted on Socrates, in a certain sense, thus educating him (even if unintentionally). In our paper, we focus on Aeschines' and Plato's portrayals of Alcibiades and on providing a philosophical account of the relationship he established with Socrates.

**Sight and *Erôs*.** In this section, we will analyse the relationship between Socrates (as an educator) and his pupil. We maintain that the specific nature of this relation in the Socratic context helps to explain Alcibiades' unusual paedetic potential and broadens our understanding of the Socratic educational method as such. In particular, we seek to answer the question of how Socratic philosophy (in this case, as conveyed by Plato) modified the notion of *Erôs*, which had played a significant role in traditional pedagogical-paederastic relations. At the same time, we will implicitly presume that Alcibiades, as he is portrayed by Plato, symbolizes archaic *Erôs*.

We assume that the specificity of this relationship can be grasped through the mutual connection between sight and the pedagogical function of *Erôs*<sup>13</sup> in Socratic philosophy.

A series of terms are connected to the notions of “sight”, “looking” and “vision” in ancient Greek. In several dialogues (e.g. *Alcibiades I*, *Phaedrus*), besides the verbs εἶδω (I see) and βλέπω (I watch), Plato uses the noun ὄψις (eyesight, looking). The same word denotes the power of sight or vision in Homer<sup>14</sup>.

The term ὄψις<sup>15</sup> is probably even older, however, and its meaning is mostly negative. In Homer<sup>16</sup> and Hesiod<sup>17</sup>, it refers mainly to the vengeance of the gods, who see everything and punish violations of divine law. A positive meaning is rare – Pindaros<sup>18</sup> praises the pious gaze and expresses the gods' favour by using this term (θεῶν ὄπιν αἰτεῖν<sup>19</sup>). According to the archaic tradition, a similar dread and terror is sometimes also brought about in people by *Erôs*. This negative aspect of *Erôs* is indicated by his epithet λυσιμελής, which means “limb-relaxing”, a capacity that is linked directly to the sense of sight – in Hesiod's *Theogony*<sup>20</sup>, love flows from under the Charites' eyelids and runs down their limbs (τῶν καὶ ἀπὸ βλεφάρων ἔρος εἴβητο δερκομενάων λυσιμελής). We can say that the god instils fear because, with his sight, eyes or gaze, he makes the epic heroes (and gods) weak, undermining the effectiveness of their heroic actions.<sup>21</sup> In the *Odyssey*, looking at the beautiful

<sup>13</sup> In Plato's *Symposium*, Socrates admits that the only thing he knows is the art of love (οὐδὲν φημι ἄλλο ἐπίστασθαι ἢ τὰ ἐρωτικά) (*Symp.* 177d, in 193e Eryximachus says that of Socrates and Agathon, also in *Phaidros* 257a, *Lysis* 204c, *Theages* 128b). For more on Socratic education as a practice of *ta erôtika*, see

Suvák (2018) 11.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Il.* XX.205; *Od.* XV.94.

<sup>15</sup> The link to ὄπ- in ὄψομαι, etc., cannot be denied. It implies an older sense of “sight, vision and looking”, which is the origin of “criticism and punishment”, on the one hand, and “reflection, respect and esteem”, on the other. The semantic evolution of the noun was partly influenced by the verb ὀπίζομαι; see Beekes (2010) 1091 and Chantraine (1968) 808.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Il.* XVI. 388; *Od.* XX. 215.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Op.* 187 a 251.

<sup>18</sup> *Isth.* V. 58.

<sup>19</sup> *Pyth.* VIII. 71.

<sup>20</sup> *Theog.* 911.

<sup>21</sup> Viték writes that such enfeeblement is caused by the loss of vital fluids, such as tears and sperm. See Viték (2010) 51.

Penelope provokes desire in her suitors and makes their limbs feeble: “Then were the men’s limbs loosened, their hearts enchanted with passion (ἔρω δ’ ἄρα θυμὸν ἔθελχθεν); they all loudly were praying to lie in the bedding beside her (πάντες δ’ ἠρήσαντο παραὶ λεχέεσσι κλιθῆναι)”<sup>22</sup>. In the *Iliad*<sup>23</sup>, it is again love that darkens Zeus’ prudent mind with a look. A similar danger is also attributed to *Erōs* by archaic lyrical poets.

According to Alcman<sup>24</sup>, the effects of this god are worse than those produced by death. Alcaeus<sup>25</sup> cites *Erōs* as the reason why Helen loses her mind. The connection between the dangers of *Erōs* and eyesight can likewise be found in the *Encomium of Helen*<sup>26</sup> by Gorgias: “If, therefore, the eye of Helen, pleased by the figure of Alexander, presented to her soul eager desire and contest of love, what wonder?” The link between the eyes (or rather sight) and *Erōs* persists even in Aristotle, who considers the eyes to be the most sexual organs in the head because they contain most of the semen (ὁ τε γὰρ περὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς τόπος τῶν περὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν σπερματικώτατος)<sup>27</sup>. In Greek thought, it was therefore commonly accepted that looking at the object of desire causes a weakening, or even a complete loss of one’s mind (φρήν).

In the ancient literary and philosophical tradition, we can therefore distinguish at least two approaches to the connection between eyesight and erotic desire: a) the archaic notion of *Erōs*, in which looking at the object of love results in the loss of one’s mind, and, as we will see below, b) the Platonic-Socratic notion of erotic love as having a positive influence on the lovers’ capacity for reasoning, and so on the shaping of an ethically excellent soul.

**Aeschines’ Alcibiades.** Aeschines of Sphettus (Ἀισχίνης ὁ Σωκρατικός) is the only Socratic writer – besides Plato and Xenophon, of course – whose substantial literary works have survived, especially including extensive fragments from his dialogues *Alcibiades*<sup>28</sup> and *Aspasia*. His prevalent position in Socrates’ circle is documented by Plato himself: Aeschines is present at Socrates’ trial<sup>29</sup>, and he spends the latter’s last hours with him before Socrates drinks the hemlock<sup>30</sup>. This familiarity with Socrates is confirmed by Diogenes Laertius<sup>31</sup>, who observes that among all the Socratic dialogues, only those by Plato, Xenophon, Antisthenes, and Aeschines are to be considered genuine.

For the purposes of the present paper, it should be stressed that Aeschines is usually regarded as the originator of the literary version of Socratic *Erōs*.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, it is evident that the highlight of Aeschines’ oeuvre as a whole is the issue of improving the self,<sup>33</sup> which is also shown<sup>34</sup> by the supposed final words of his

<sup>22</sup> *Od.* XVIII.212–213; trans. R. Merrill.

<sup>23</sup> *Il.* XIV. 294.

<sup>24</sup> Alcman, fr. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Alcaeus, fr. 283.

<sup>26</sup> Gorg., *Hel.* § 19; trans. G. A. Kennedy.

<sup>27</sup> Aristotle, *De gen. anim.* 747a13.

<sup>28</sup> Dittmar estimates that the dialogue probably appeared between 394–393 and 391–390 BC, Dittmar (1912) 174.

<sup>29</sup> *Apol.* 33e.

<sup>30</sup> *Phaed.* 59e.

<sup>31</sup> DL II.7.64.

<sup>32</sup> Kahn (1994) 87.

<sup>33</sup> Döring writes of the protreptic function of Aeschines’ dialogues, the objective of which is to lead to “Besser-Werden” and “Besser-Machen”. See Döring (1984) 17.

*Alcibiades* – βελτίω ποιῆσαι (“to make better”). The central topic of Aeschines’ writing would thus seem to be *paideia*.<sup>35</sup> With this noted, however, what is the nature of the paedeutical relationship between Alcibiades and Socrates in Aeschines, and what role does erotic desire play in it?

Despite the fragmentary nature of Aeschines’ literary remains, it seems that his portrayal of Alcibiades largely corresponds to our main thesis, namely that the relationship between Alcibiades and Socrates positively transforms not only the former but also the latter.

The fact that the paedeutical relation between Socrates and Alcibiades is reciprocal – i.e. that Alcibiades also helps Socrates, such that the latter can become an educator and act accordingly – can be inferred from fragments found in Aelius Aristides<sup>36</sup>. According to the available information, it seems that loving the beautiful Alcibiades has an ecstatic effect on Socrates. In their relationship, the positive employment of erotic desire brings Socrates to a state of divine ecstasy, one that resembles the excitement experienced by bacchantes:

Because of the love that I have for Alcibiades, I have the same experience as the bacchantes (ἐγὼ δὲ διὰ τὸν ἔρωτα ὃν ἐτύγχανον ἐρῶν Ἀλκιβιάδου οὐδὲν διάφορον τῶν Βακχῶν ἐπεπόνθειν). For when the bacchantes are possessed (ἔνθεοι γένωνται), they draw milk and honey from wells where others cannot even draw water. And so although I know no science or skill that I could teach to anyone (ἐγὼ οὐδὲν μάθημα ἐπιστάμενος ὃ διδάξας ἄνθρωπον) to benefit him, nevertheless I thought that in keeping company with Alcibiades I could by the power of love make him better (βελτίω ποιῆσαι)<sup>37</sup>.

The effect of *Erôs*, described in this way, can be regarded as a divine dispensation, or better, a divine gift (θεία μοίρα), referring to the realm of the irrational. This realm is in sharp contrast to education by means of τέχνη, an example of which was offered to Aeschines’ Alcibiades in Themistocles<sup>38</sup>, although it did not exercise a positive influence on the youth. Why does Socrates’ education achieve such effects?

One of the chief principles of Socratic education – which differ from those that were likely applied in Alcibiades’ education by Themistocles – is shaping friendship in such a manner that Socrates adapts his own conduct (or education) to the character of his future pupil/friend: “[...] It makes a big difference to approach a human being according to nature and correctly. For to be sure you would neither take nor hold a friend by violence, but this prey is both captured and kept constant by means of benefaction and pleasure”<sup>39</sup>. We find the same principle in Plato’s *Phaedrus*<sup>40</sup> – the good rhetorician is endowed with a “versatility” (πολυτροπία); that is, he is able to

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Joyal (1993) 267.

<sup>35</sup> The fact that the dialogue is set in a gymnasium (παλαίστρα) highlights an important part of traditional Greek education – γυμναστική τέχνη (cf. Ael. Aristid. *De rhet.* I. 61–64).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *De rhet.* I.61–6.

<sup>37</sup> Ael. Aristid. *De rhet.* I 74 [= SSR VI A 53]; trans. Ch. Kahn.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Ael. Aristid. *De quatt.* 575 [= SSR VI A 49].

<sup>39</sup> Xenophon, *Mem.* III.11.11; trans. A. L. Bonnette.

<sup>40</sup> *Phaedr.* 271b.



choose appropriate words according to the nature of his audience and so to “move” that particular human character.<sup>41</sup>

As for Aeschines, his Alcibiades seems to be a symbol of archaic *paideia* (Antisthenes even suggests a comparison between Alcibiades and the Homeric paedetic role model, Achilles<sup>42</sup>) or of archaic *Erôs*. This explains why Aeschines’ Socrates allowed himself to be possessed by the irrational, Bacchic power of love: Socrates yields to Alcibiades so that he might effect a conversion of the latter’s heart to the good (τοῦτό γε ἄμεινόν πως διεχέρισεν<sup>43</sup>). Despite the negative effects of archaic *Erôs*, however, this irrational force does not weaken Socrates; on the contrary, it makes him stronger, and without it he would not be able to educate Alcibiades.

**Plato’s Alcibiades and surpassing archaic *Erôs*.** At first sight, Plato’s Socrates seems to reject archaic *Erôs*. He longs not for a beautiful body but for a beautiful soul. Gazing into the eyes of his beautiful partner in conversation thus cannot weaken the strength of his mind. It is not physical appearance that matters to Socrates because the human eye perceives only the “Heraclitean” world of becoming. What matters is inner sight, which holds a distinctive position in Platonism.

Nevertheless, we wish to argue that the physical power of sight, that is, sight that perceives not the beauty of thought but the beauty of the body, still plays an important role in Plato’s philosophy. We will maintain that, every now and then, Plato’s Socrates experiences a fear similar to that which was aroused by mythological, archaic *Erôs*. We will attempt to justify our assumptions by providing an analysis of selected passages from the *Alcibiades I*, the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*. At the same time, we will reveal the nature of the relation between the educator and the educated in the Socratic tradition.

The *Alcibiades I*<sup>44</sup> depicts the beginning of the pedagogical relationship between Plato’s Socrates and the future statesman Alcibiades. The abovementioned nature of archaic *Erôs* is shown in the prooemium of the dialogue, where Socrates explains why he did not approach the young Alcibiades earlier:

I was the first man to fall in love with you (πρῶτος ἐραστής), son of Clinias, and now that the others have stopped pursuing you I suppose you’re wondering why I’m the only one who hasn’t given up – and also why, when the others pestered you with conversation, I never even spoke to you all these years. Human causes didn’t enter into it; I was prevented by some divine being (τι δαιμόνιον δύναμιν), the effect of which you’ll hear about later on.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>41</sup> In his *Life of Alcibiades*, Plutarch states that Alcibiades later adopted this communicational ability from Socrates (*Alc.* 23).

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *SSR V A* 199.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *SSR VI A* 51.

<sup>44</sup> The dialogue is generally considered “semi-authentic”. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, several scholars, such as Friedländer (1921–1923) and Stefanini (1932), convincingly argued for its authenticity. Thesleff, however, maintains that all we can exclude is its post-Platonic character. The most important considerations that speak against its authenticity, according to Thesleff, are its lack of wit and the fact that the dialogue used to be read as a textbook of Socratic and Platonic philosophy, Thesleff (2009) 361–362. In any case, commentators generally agree that the author of the dialogue was well acquainted with Socratic-Platonic philosophy. What is most interesting given our present purposes is the claim that the dialogue was written as a reference point for internal discussions concerning the doctrine of Plato’s Academy, Thesleff (2009) 362.

<sup>45</sup> Plato, *Alc. I* 103a; trans. D. S. Hutchinson.

Scholars<sup>46</sup> usually set the dramatic date of the dialogue at 430/429 BC. Its plot may have been set approximately two years after Alcibiades' participation in the battle of Potidaea, shortly before the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War.

For dramatic effect, the author exploits a set of literary *topos*<sup>47</sup> when he refers to Alcibiades' beauty and to its gradual diminishment (ἐπειδὴ λήγει ἀνθοῦν) (*Alc. I*. 131c). This may have been the real reason why the *Daimonion* prevented Socrates from approaching the youth:

Well, I'm the one who won't leave you – I'm the one who will stay with you, now that your body has lost its bloom and everyone else has gone away. [...] I was your only lover – the others were only lovers of what you had. While your possessions are passing their prime, you are just beginning to bloom. I shall never forsake you now, never, unless the Athenian people make you corrupt and ugly. (*Alc. I* 131d–132a; trans. D. S. Hutchinson)

Earlier, we learned that Alcibiades was about twenty years old<sup>48</sup>. The Greek term μειράκιον (sometimes παῖς<sup>49</sup> or νεανίσκος) refers to a young boy between fifteen and twenty (sometimes even twenty-one) years old.<sup>50</sup> It is precisely this period of a young boy's life that was marked by the paederastic<sup>51</sup> influence of *Erôs*. The eponymous Alcibiades, however, is already at the threshold of that age; his bloom is fading, and he is no longer a danger to potential lovers who may meet his gaze.<sup>52</sup> Accordingly, we maintain that Socrates did not approach the young Alcibiades precisely for fear of the effects of *Erôs*, and thus for fear of losing his mind. Despite Socrates' claim that the true reason for his behaviour was his *Daimonion*, Plato's dramatic description of the future Athenian statesman (his beauty, charm, age) supports the view that Socrates was worried about directly confronting the beautiful youth (face to face). We presume that in these passages, the original meaning of sight is revealed, one that implies awe and fear before the god of desire.

Nonetheless, we have not yet provided an answer to the question of why Socrates avoided Alcibiades. We suppose that an answer can be found in the context of other Platonic dialogues (the peculiar relation between Socrates and Alcibiades in the *Symposium*)<sup>53</sup> as well as in the historical background (Socrates' meeting with

<sup>46</sup> See Baynham, Tarrant (2013, 2015).

<sup>47</sup> See Plutarch's account of Alcibiades' beauty in *Alc. I*.

<sup>48</sup> *Alc. I*. 123d.

<sup>49</sup> However, taking examples from Plato's *Lysis* (206d–e) and *Charmides* (154a), Dover shows that there was a clear distinction between παῖς, μειράκιον, and νεανίσκος. See Dover (1989) 85.

<sup>50</sup> See Dean-Jones (2013) 112.

<sup>51</sup> In aristocratic circles, this age was connected with an institution called συνουσία in Greek. Youths were associated with older men, who played the role of mentor. Συνουσία often took on an erotic dimension. For the meaning of μειράκιον, see Robb (1994, 2015). According to some authors, this period ended when the youth began to grow a beard. See Dover (1989) 89 and Plato (*Prot.* 309a).

<sup>52</sup> A direct link between looking into another's eyes and erotic weakness can also be found in the *Charmides*: “[When] he turned his full gaze upon me (ἐνέβλεψέν τέ μοι τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς) in a manner beyond description and seemed on the point of asking a question, and when everyone in the palaestra surged all around us in a circle, my noble friend, I saw inside his cloak and caught on fire and was quite beside myself (ἐφλεγόμην καὶ οὐκέτ' ἐν ἑμαυτοῦ ἦν)” (*Charm.* 155c–d; trans. R. K. Sprague).

<sup>53</sup> In his *Symposium*, Plato shows that the typical paederastic relationship of ἐραστής (older, active lover) and ἐρώμενος (younger, passive beloved) (see Dover 1989, 16) is inverted when it comes to

Alcibiades, who remains known to history for many impious acts, which points fittingly to the wording of Socrates' accusation).<sup>54</sup>

Let us proceed with the question of how, exactly, Plato's Socrates overcame archaic *Erôs*. In this regard, we should take into account the assumption that Socratic education was realized by means of face-to-face conversation. Consequently, Socratic education could not have bypassed direct confrontation with the pupil. There is a further vital part of this question, however, which is pointed out by Martha Nussbaum and which concerns not the pupil but the philosopher as a teacher: in order to philosophize, must the philosopher meet anyone in particular and love him?<sup>55</sup> Must the educator necessarily meet and love anyone to be able to educate? From Plato's dialogues, we know that Socratic education requires a direct confrontation – usually in the form of a two-person dialogue. But how is Socrates able to love without being weakened by the power of *Erôs*?

The fact that Socrates had a hard time taming his intense erotic passion for the beautiful Alcibiades is known from other sources as well. In his *Sophists at Dinner*, Athenaeus relates that Socrates even wept at not having succeeded in seducing Alcibiades<sup>56</sup>. Moreover, from a testimony by Aristoxenus<sup>57</sup> we know that Socrates was not an ideal, virtuous and moderate philosopher at all – he was reportedly intemperate (ἀκόλαστος) and suffered terrifying fits of rage from which he could not extract himself in word or deed<sup>58</sup>. A fragment from Phaedo's dialogue *Zopyrus* also indicates Socrates' natural immoderateness, which he later managed to control through rational exercises.<sup>59</sup> Finally, from Plato's *Charmides* we learn that Socrates did not hesitate to use a trick<sup>60</sup> to talk to a beautiful boy. Nowhere does Plato's Socrates explicitly state that he was virtuous. If it is true that Socrates was not equipped with virtue and had a natural inclination to erotic jealousy, we can assume that not only his pupil but also Socrates himself had something to learn from the pedagogic relationship. This assumption is also supported by the concept of the traditional paederastic relationship, which is reciprocal – the ἐρώμενος receives an education from his older lover, while the ἐραστής receives sexual gratification. If Socrates as an educator has given up sexual pleasure, what does he have to gain from this relationship?

Let us return to the *Alcibiades I*. We can observe that its first half contains an argument that is similar to that in the *Symposium*, where an account of *Erôs* is attempted. In the latter dialogue, the character of *Erôs* – the one who always lies between knowing and not knowing, between suffering and fulfilment<sup>61</sup> – is derived from the tenet that he who is wise does not seek wisdom, and he who is unaware of his deficiency (his ignorance) does not long for that the lack of which he does not feel<sup>62</sup>. In the former dialogue, Socrates confronts Alcibiades with the same problem:<sup>63</sup>

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Socrates and Alcibiades. Alcibiades becomes the lover, and Socrates becomes the object of erotic desire (Plato, *Symp.* 217c).

<sup>54</sup> Ancient testimonies report that Alcibiades was accused of introducing new gods and of sacrilegious acts more generally (including the famous mutilation of the *hermai*), cf. Plutarch., *Alc.* 4.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Nussbaum deals with throughout *The Fragility of Goodness* (2003) (especially pp. 408–425).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *Ath.* 219c–f

<sup>57</sup> See Huffman 2012, 267–269.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. fr. 54a–b, Wehrli.

<sup>59</sup> See Kahn (1996) 11–12.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. *Charm.* 155c.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. *Symp.* 204b–c.

<sup>62</sup> *Symp.* 204a.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. also *Meno* 80e.



**Socrates:** Could you ever have learned or found out anything without wanting to learn it or work it out yourself?

**Alcibiades:** No, I couldn't have.

**Socrates:** Is that right? Would you have wanted to learn or work out something that you thought you understood?

**Alcibiades:** Of course not. (Plato, *Alc. I* 106d; trans. D. S. Hutchinson)

Although Plato does not elaborate on the issue here by drawing a direct analogy with *Erôs*, as he does in the *Symposium*, in looking for the right answer *Erôs* is always present in an optical paradigm,<sup>64</sup> which acquires a typical Platonic character in the second half of the dialogue. This gazing into the eyes of the beloved departs from the archaic notion of a terrifying *Erôs*<sup>65</sup> and instead becomes an expression of the pedagogical reciprocity between the pupil and the teacher. As the educator, Socrates does not care about what Alcibiades possesses (his visual beauty); he only cares for Alcibiades himself (his soul). On the other hand, as the pupil, Alcibiades must come to know himself via Socrates so that he can obtain knowledge of all other things<sup>66</sup>. Otherwise, he will never achieve the condition of having a permanent desire for further knowledge (suffering), although he will already possess a certain amount of knowledge (fulfilment). The pedagogical reciprocity is expressed through an optical metaphor that indicates that Socrates, too, learns something in the process of seeing (βλέπειν). The Delphic γνῶθι σεαυτόν is thus transformed into the Platonic<sup>67</sup> γνῶθι σεαυτόν:

**Socrates:** Then let's think of something that allows us to see both it and ourselves (ἡμᾶς αὐτούς) when we look at it.

**Alcibiades:** Obviously, Socrates, you mean mirrors and that sort of thing.

**Socrates:** Quite right. And isn't there something like the eye, which we see with (τῷ ὀφθαλμῷ ᾧ ὀρώμεν)?

**Alcibiades:** Certainly.

**Socrates:** I'm sure you've noticed that when a man looks into an eye his face appears in it, like in a mirror. We can call this the "pupil", for it's a sort of miniature

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<sup>64</sup> See Wohl (2012).

<sup>65</sup> Porov. Platón, *Alc. I*. 130e.

<sup>66</sup> *Alc. I* 129a.

<sup>67</sup> Regarding the *Alcibiades I*, we intentionally use the label "Platonic", not "Plato's".

of the man who's looking (εἶδωλον ὄν τι τοῦ ἐμβλέποντος).

**Alcibiades:** You're right.

**Socrates:** Then an eye will see itself (οὕτως ἂν αὐτὸν ἴδοι) if it observes an eye and looks at the best part of it, the part with which it can see. (*Alc. I* 132d–133b; trans. D. S. Hutchinson)

For Plato, seeing is an analogy for thinking. If we recall the allegories from the *Republic*, we note that there is an important link between seeing and thinking in all three of them (the darkness in the cave vs. the light outside; the sun/the idea of the Good enabling sight and knowledge; the realm of the visible vs. the realm of the intelligible in the divided line). Paradoxically, all of these allegories refer to sight and seeing as a kind of cognition which is categorically inferior to authentic knowledge (we can see the shadows, reflections on the surface of a body of water, the ephemeral realm of plants and animals<sup>68</sup>). At any rate, we maintain that when Plato mentions seeing accompanied by *Erôs*,<sup>69</sup> he refers to a type of cognition that leads to higher knowledge. In the *Phaedrus*, the “erotic” gaze is even a metaphor for the dialectical process, or philosophical θεωρία,<sup>70</sup> whereby, again, an important role is played by the reciprocal ἀντέρως,<sup>71</sup> or counter-love<sup>72</sup>.

Socrates looks Alcibiades in the eyes. What does Socrates the educator gain from this reciprocal process? Or rather, how is Socrates the philosopher educated by the haughty Alcibiades?

Socrates gazes into the eyes of the beautiful Alcibiades and cannot let himself be overcome by the violent and terrifying power of archaic *Erôs*. Through Alcibiades and his unusual beauty, he becomes aware of his own limits. Alcibiades' *Erôs* – that is, his desire – has a genuine pedagogical effect on Socrates: the eyes of the beloved become a means of self-reflection and a necessary condition of Socrates' philosophical self-mastery, the aim of which is to transform the erotic relationship into the love of friendship.<sup>73</sup> That *philia*, or friendship, is the further stage of erotic love in Plato's philosophy is shown in the *Phaedrus*<sup>74</sup> and in the *Laws*, where *Erôs* is presented as a more violent version of *philia*, such that a condition for the emergence of *philia* is the taming of wild lust (ἐπιθυμία), which, according to Plato, is a facet of erotic love<sup>75</sup>.

From what has been shown above, we can conclude that we must answer our question, originally formulated by Nussbaum – namely, whether the educator must

<sup>68</sup> *Resp.* VI 509e–510a.

<sup>69</sup> This is a specific Platonic concept of the *daimôn* as an intermediary between human and divine knowledge, the equivalent of which is represented by Socrates' philosophical activity (cf. Plato, *Symp.* 202e).

<sup>70</sup> Spectatorship as a metaphor for philosophical activity is developed in a fragment from the work of Plato's pupil, Heraclides Ponticus, in the *Life of Pythagoras* by Diogenes Laertius (*ap.* DL VIII 1). Cf. also Plato, *Theaet.* 173c–174c, where philosophy is described as being concerned with the observation of celestial bodies.

<sup>71</sup> Vlastos believed that Plato's erotic theory did not put emphasis on the love felt by the beloved, see Vlastos (1973, 32. Based on this passage from the *Phaedrus*, however, we must disagree. Obdrzalek (2013) 222–226 also argues against Vlastos's view.

<sup>72</sup> *Phaedr.* 255c–255d.

<sup>73</sup> In the *Alcibiades I*, *philia* is a condition for unity (*Alc. I.* 127b).

<sup>74</sup> Cf. *Phaedr.* 255e: οἶεται οὐκ ἔρωτα ἀλλὰ φιλίαν εἶναι.

<sup>75</sup> *Leg.* VIII. 837a–d.

love in order to educate – in the affirmative. In the pupil–educator relationship, not only Socrates but also Alcibiades must love in the right way.<sup>76</sup> If Socrates abandons archaic *Erôs*, so must his pupil.<sup>77</sup> At the conclusion of Plato’s *Symposium*, we realize that Alcibiades’ prognosis of his eventually becoming the *pedagogue* of Socrates<sup>78</sup> in fact has a tragic meaning. Alcibiades becomes the lover in a traditional sense<sup>79</sup>: he is the one who leaves the boundaries of Platonic *Erôs* and returns to archaic *Erôs*, in which looking upon physical beauty weakens the lover. Socrates’ relationship with Alcibiades can also be interpreted in terms of Plato’s ladder of love<sup>80</sup> – this relationship becomes a metaphor for the gradual ascent of the steps of the ladder, which reaches from desire for a beautiful body to desire for a beautiful soul. However, we should keep in mind that for the Socratic philosopher, the first step of this ladder – that is, an original, untamed longing for the beautiful Alcibiades – is also crucial.

Like Aeschines, in a sense, Plato exploits the notion of archaic *Erôs*. A tight connection between eyesight and *Erôs* is omnipresent, but it assumes a new form. Whereas in the earlier tradition the view that *Erôs* weakens the physical or inner strength of the hero prevailed, Plato conceives of gazing into the eyes of the beloved as something that can make a person stronger internally. Thanks to his confrontation with the beautiful and yearning Alcibiades, Socrates practices his ἄσκησις. In Alcibiades’ eyes, he perceives his own desire as if in a mirror. Thus, the philosopher’s self-reflection is possible. He begins by working with his lust and proceeds to the next step on the ladder of love, becoming morally more excellent. Plato cannot leave the dangerous archaic *Erôs* behind unless the one who loves authentically is not only the educator but also the pupil. The idea of “loving authentically” here indicates the reciprocity of the pedagogical process (ἀντίρροπος) and the common surpassing of passionate erotic love towards the achievement of *philia*. What is necessary is gazing directly into the other’s eyes, into the other’s soul.<sup>81</sup>

**Conclusion.** Alcibiades is one of the most interesting characters in the Socratic literature. His ambivalence – he surpasses everybody both in virtue and in vice – inspired the Socratic authors to incorporate this exceptional figure into their philosophical doctrines, such that the literary Alcibiades typically reveals key issues related to Socratic *paideia*.

If we return to the question of how the arrogant Alcibiades could have had a positive effect on the philosopher Socrates, however, Plato and Aeschines provide different answers. The above analysis of the pedagogical-paederastic relationship and the shift within Plato’s optical paradigm (archaic *Erôs*, who divests the hero of his vital force, vs. Platonic *Erôs*, who strengthens the hero) has shown that Alcibiades’ violent love genuinely educates Socrates so that he can avoid the pitfalls of archaic *Erôs* and transform erotic love of a beautiful body into friendship with a beautiful soul. Although Aeschines refers to the positive employment of erotic desire, this

<sup>76</sup> In the *Symposium*, again, the same process is described via an optical metaphor, cf. Plato, *Symp.* 218d–219a.

<sup>77</sup> In this pedagogical relationship, willingness is vital – the pupil must accept Socrates’ way of teaching voluntarily. As an example of a man who does not want to listen to Socrates (who does not want to be educated by him), Teloh cites the sophist Thrasymachus, see Teloh (1986) 82–97.

<sup>78</sup> *Alc. I* 135d.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. *Symp.* 217c.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. *Symp.* 210a–212b.

<sup>81</sup> The importance of this aspect of Socratic education, namely the necessity of continual meetings with Socrates, is confirmed by Xenophon, who relates that Alcibiades and Critias remained moderate only so long as they met with Socrates. Cf. *Mem.* I 2, 15.

employment is of a different kind. Erotic desire leads Socrates to divine enthusiasm (ἔνθεοι γένωνται), through which he becomes able to educate Alcibiades and to make him better (βελτίω ποιῆσαι). This would be impossible without mutual longing: without love for Alcibiades, Socrates would remain without knowledge (ἐγὼ οὐδὲν μάθημα ἐπιστάμενος) and would therefore lack the necessary educative capacity. Moreover, we maintain that in the case of Aeschines' Socrates, an important pedagogical role is played by the educator's *polytropia*. Socrates aligns his teachings on virtue with the character of his pupil. He educates the passionate Alcibiades via the irrational means of divine power and divine dispensation (θεά μοῖρα).

Whereas in Aeschines' portrayal of Socrates our thesis is confirmed by explicit textual evidence – Socrates is able to teach because of his love for Alcibiades – in the case of Plato's Socrates, the justification of the thesis is based on a broader interpretation which must take into account the context of various Platos, or rather Platonic dialogues. If we take into consideration Kahn's claim that Aeschines was the initiator of the Socratic notion of *Erôs*, however, it is perhaps most useful to approach the problem from the perspective of Aeschines' thought.

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