Ensaio 61

Tópico 4

1 Introduction

The clash among concepts, concerned to beauty and values, are present in Occidental Philosophy. Whilst some thinkers believe in the existence of values inherent to human nature, others disagree radically from this point of view. An interesting dialogue that involves this matter can be found in Plato's works, between Socrates and Diotima.

This essay aims to analyse the extract. For that matter, it will be structured in sections. In section one I will point out premises that can be extracted from the text. In section two I will approach the origins of concepts and values, arguing that they are human constructs. In section two I will argue about the two first premises, decision grounded on one seeming the consequence of the other, and defend their validity. On section three I will approach the third premise. Then I will conclude.

- There's a state between wisdom and ignorance, as well as between good and bad and beautiful and ugly
- The existence of opposite values doesn't imply the abscense of things that can be classified somewhere between these two "poles". ("Love [...] could be something in between")
- Love is between beautiful and ugly (the same)

2.   On the origins of our concepts

 Before going deeper into the matter of the possibilities of scaping concept's limitations, I believe it is relevant to set some considerations concerned to the essence of our concepts, for then to argue on the premises involving them. For that, I would like to turn to the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche.

Nietzsche proposed that human concepts and values were not part of a "human essence", but were created by humans . A vivid example of this can be set when comparing the current values of Brazilian society with the ones from Empires which economy was set upon slave labour. Nowadays we have adhered to the conception that all people are equal, and have the same rights. However, past societies had completely distinct views, segregating people by their birth to attend to the dominant group's wishes . It indicates how values and conceptions of the world vary not only with time, but with the cultural scenario as well. As they vary depending on the concept, it can be argued that values such as good, bad, beautiful and ugly may have different meanings depending on the human group (be it a state, and a social class, and so on).

But are conceptions formed the way they are? According to the thinker, it is a reflection of the dominant classes, that imposes their own values of the rest of the society. Nietzsche found evidences of it when studying the origins of words in different languages. In German, for example, the word "bad" derives from the word "simple", and further analysis lead him to conclude that a remote dominant class had associated the concept of being socially inferior (such as a commoner or a slave- "simple") as being something bad. It indicates that concepts are "artificial" (and changeable, since the in its philosophy the christian view took place after that, turning upside down such conception).

It can be counter argued that some principles are present in the majority of cultures, such as the prohibitions of murdering and stealing. Notwithstanding, I believe that these are only points of view that have been spread (as it helps to maintain the social structure), and does not represent a natural tendency of humanity to organize itself. Turning again to other

historical example: In Sparta, children born with deformities were killed, since their utility for a society that praised for strength and war was minimal. Nowadays, killing a child with deformities is almost inconceivable.That shows not only that values, not matter how "universal" shall they seem, vary with time, and can not be considered that way.

This notion is important for the development of this text, since being the those concepts humanly made, they cannot contain all possible aspects of reality in it.

3. A term in the middle

A. The existence of opposite values doesn't imply the absence of things that can be classified somewhere between these two "poles"

Considering concepts as being human made, they do not cover all aspects of reality. In other words, they do not express "guidelines" that all things can be contained in. Actually, I believe, their original intention was to classify "extremes" (such as boiling water was called hot" and ice "cold"),but, as there are many possible variations, we try to classify things accordingly to these extremes (that is why we say that water at 90°C is "hot" as well) , implying that they are no "exact measurements" for everything. Not only these concepts are insufficient if we use only to classify all things,but as we previouly saw the meaning that they carry can vary too, what makes a proper classification for certain things seem almost impossible.

As an example, there are the different concepts of beauty among distinct societies. Although nowadays globalisation seems to have promoted a "standard" of what beauty means, there are cultures that don't agree with this vision (as well as different individuals) . Mauritania, for example, has a concept of beauty that values "heavy" human, (opposing to the majority of the world, that cherishes the exact contrary). However, acknowledging this relation between beauty and weight, we can get to the following (ignoring individual exceptions, that frequently exist) :

In Mauritania, having a aesthetically pleasing size = being heavy
In many other countries, it is = being slim

This could indicate that there are different prerequisites to being considered beautiful around the world. However, another point can be made: It does not specify what "being heavy" means, nor what "being "slim". Weight, seen as the main "guideline" for defining this concept, cannot be solely used, since there are people with different heights, body structure, and so on. Because of these multiple factors, human perception can sometimes classify the same person as "heavy" or "slim", if they show a distance from both of these "poles" according to our opinion.

In addition to that, there are characteristics based on concepts that are exact and not open for discussion. René Descartes, for example, claims mathematical concepts can not be contested. A square, for example, is an exact concept.Or it is a square or it is not, there is no position in the middle. However,as the text approaches only subjective notions, I will attain to them.

What I mean by saying this is that sometimes our criteria for classifying things, because we rely on our own interpretation for that, may not reveal a secure definition, and that not simply because the concepts on which our interpretation is based are mere generalizations, not exact notions, but because it relies on our interpretation as well. That said, the first premise seems valid.

But, does that simply means that for subjective opposite concepts there are things that cannot be classified onto it? If that is the case, this second premise is valid as well.

Although a generalization may seem rough, I do not think it is possible to find a subjective value that present an exact definition, since the term "subjective" itself refers to something that depends on the individual's look. Considering that, a mid term between the opposite values proposed seems valid, since they are subjective. What are the criteria to define something beautiful, good and , rather than human an individual's own opinion? Nonetheless, it can be said that these things cannot be properly classified, since they vary from person to person. However I would like to defend that it is not because there can be two or more possible answers to something that there are no answers to it. Indication of it is the philosophy itself, that often contains several points of view concerned to the same matter,and all of these answers, when based into something concrete, can be validated. Other example: a friend can say you're beautiful because your eyes are attractive, whilst your uncle can say you are ugly because of the size of your ears. That indicates that classifications that rely on one's judgement can vary, and that open space to mid terms, since the doubt can show up during such classifications. That said, although there are concepts that are exact, the ones brought up in Plato's work are subjective and it may be impossible to classify all existent things and beings through such opposite terms, leading me to conclude the second premise,on what it intends to communicate, is valid.

4.   About love

Diatoma refers to love as being not beautiful, but at the same time not ugly, and good, but at the same time not bad. To analyse this premise, I would like to distance myself temporarily from the idea that such concepts are human made, and attempt to infer what the character meant. By love, I believe she meant the *eros,* or romantic love (using a greek classification of love). I base that on the supposition that the other types of love that exist in this system, such as *philia and agape,* are considered, in essence, positive things, whilst *eros* presents both positive and negative sides (such as what the character intends to say).Before proceeding, I would like to consider that *Eros* is the type of love equivalent to "passion", an urge to love and be loved by a certain thing.

Now,I am going to analyse each of the characterization Diotima presents

- Love is good and bad: can it be? If we turn to an utilitarian view, yes.This view considers good what promotes pleasure, and bad what promotes suffering. Passion promotes both of this things: while it can promote pleasure for the good times you can enjoy, it can promote suffering if this person treats you badly, for example. If that is the case, this first part, at least when allied with the this philosophy, is valid, since the same feeling provides both pain and pleasure, being, then, good and bad.
- Love is beautiful and ugly: I agree with this, since the concepts of beauty and ugly are too extensive concepts. Being that way, for someone a bad experience with this type of love may have left a conception that passion is an "ugly" feeling, whilst for someone else it could be totally different.At the same time, multiple experiences can provide an individual a conception that love is not ugly or beautiful, but something between these, since this word represents a feeling that can be considered both beautiful and ugly, which means it can be considered none of these as well.

That said, according to my view, love *can* be between ugly and beautiful and/or bad and good simultaneously, since it relies, as said before, on what people think about it.

Conclusion

In this essay I analysed the dialogue between Diatoma an Socrates, written by Plato. I started introducing the topic, explaining how would the text be organized and pointing out three premises I would examine. Then, I argued on the nature of our concepts. After that, I analysed the premises and indicated my position towards them. The main points I defended were:

- Concepts such as the extract's are human made
- There are subjective and exact concepts, being the first one the aim of this analysis
- For subjective concepts there are things that escape from their "covering area", being in the middle of it and its antonym
- Love can be at the same time,between beautiful and ugly or good and bad.