

Six

A Study in Violets: Alcibiades in the *Symposium*C. D. C. Reeve¹

AGATHON'S DRINKING-PARTY has reached its philosophical apogee in Socrates' vivid, Diotima-inspired description of the ultimate object of all love and desire, the Platonic form of beauty—the beautiful itself. All of a sudden, there is a commotion and loud knocking. Someone “very drunk and shouting loudly” is “asking, Where is Agathon? and saying, Take me to Agathon” (*Symposium* 212d5).² Alcibiades, the best-looking man in Athens, has arrived, “crowned with a bushy wreath of ivy and violets and a multitude of fillets on his head” (212e1–2). And what happens? The beautiful itself gets eclipsed by the beautiful body; the philosophical apogee trumped by the theatrical one. The speech Alcibiades subsequently gives is riveting, too, as dramatic as his entrance. It casts the other speeches into the shade. It is so vivid, so entertaining, so alive, in fact, that we almost forget it had any predecessors.

Alcibiades insists at the outset that he will tell the truth and invites Socrates to see that he does: “if I say anything untrue, interrupt me right in the middle, if you wish, and say that I said it falsely; for I won't willingly say anything false” (214e10–215a2). At the same time, he admits that it isn't easy for someone as drunk as he is to present things “fluently and in the correct order (*euporōs kai ephexēs*)” (215a3–4). Given the importance had by *euporia*,

¹ This is a revised version of the paper I gave at the conference. The revisions sufficiently changed the thrust of the paper to require a new title. I am grateful to all of the conferees, especially Ruby Blondell for reminding me (again!) about the etymology of *agalma*, Christopher Rowe for demanding more about *ta erōtika*, and Gabriel Richardson Lear for being sufficiently puzzled by some remarks about Kant that I omitted them. Helpful written comments from Frisbee Sheffield, Jim Leshner, and an anonymous referee led to further significant changes. Thanks, finally, to Jim Leshner, Debra Nails, and Frisbee Sheffield for organizing the conference and inviting me to participate, and to Gregory Nagy and the staff of CHS for hosting it in such style.

² Translations, sometimes silently modified in minor ways, are from Allen 1991.

its opposite *aporia*, and the idea of correct order in the preceding sections of the *Symposium*, we are duly warned to interpret Alcibiades' speech with care. I shall focus, first, on something within the speech itself, namely, the use of the term *agalmata* (singular, *agalma*), and, then, on two other terms related to correct order and its disruption, which are used to contextualize it—*epi dexia* ('from left to right') and *exaiphnēs* ('all of a sudden'). *Euporia* and *aporia* are discussed at various points throughout.

In Plato, an *agalma* (from the verb *agallein*, meaning to glorify or honor something) is a figurative statue in honor of a god or, more often, a figurative statue of any sort—the puppets which cast their shadows on the walls of the cave in *Republic* VII are *agalmata* (517d7).³ The question is, can this be what *agalmata* are for Alcibiades? Initially, the answer seems to be yes: “I say that Socrates is exactly like those silenuses sitting in the statuary shops, the kind the craftsmen manufacture, with flutes or pipes, but when opened in the middle, they prove to have *agalmata* of the gods inside them” (215a7–b3). But though Silenuses could have been statues that, like Russian dolls, contained smaller statues inside them, “no examples have survived, nor are there any references to such a type of statue except in late passages dependent on this one” (Dover 1980:166). It has been conjectured, indeed, that what Alcibiades is referring to are not statues at all, but moulds for making them (Peters 1976; Rowe 1998a:206). According to François Rabelais, writing in 1534, they were not even moulds, but painted boxes: “a Silenus, in ancient days, was a little box, of the kind we see today in apothecaries' shops, painted on the outside with such gay, comical figures as harpies and satyrs” (Cohen 1955:37).⁴ Alcibiades' supposedly helpful image of Socrates is almost as plagued by *atopia* ('strangeness'), therefore, as the man himself (215a3–4).

In the second passage, matters are unclear for a different reason:

As to his appearance—isn't it Silenus-like. Of course it is. His outside covering is like a carved⁵ Silenus, but when he is opened, gentlemen and drinking companions, can you guess how he teems with temperance within?... But he is sly and dishonest and spends his whole life

³ A glance at the occurrences recorded in Brandwood 1976 will bear this out: *Charmides* 154c8, *Critias* 110b5, 116d7, e4, *Epinomis* 983e6, 984a4, 5, *Laws* 738c6, 931a1, 6, d6, e6, 956b1, *Meno* 97d6, *Philebus* 38d10, *Phaedrus* 230b8, 251a6, 252d7, *Protagoras* 322a5, *Timaeus* 37c7. *Agalmatopoios* ('sculptor' or 'statue-maker') occurs at *Protagoras* 311c7, 8, e2. More generally, though, “anything on which one *agalletai*” (Griffith 1999:243), such as a child (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 208) or fame (Sophocles, *Antigone* 704), can be an *agalma*.

⁴ Thanks to Scott LaBarge for this reference.

⁵ *Geglumenos silenōs: gluphein* also means to hollow out (as one might a mould).

playing with people. Yet, I don't know whether anyone else has seen the *agalmata* within when he is in earnest (*spoudasantos*) and opened up, but I saw them once, and I thought that they were so divine and golden, so marvelously beautiful, that whatever Socrates might bid must, in short, be done. Believing he was earnestly (*espoudakenai*) pursuing my youthful beauty, I thought it was a stroke of luck and my wonderful good fortune, because by gratifying Socrates I could hear everything he knew. For I was amazingly proud of my vernal bloom.

Symposium 216d4–217a6

We expect Alcibiades to abandon the simile at this point and tell us what it was he actually saw inside Socrates. Instead he perplexingly continues to speak in figural terms: what he saw were *agalmata*. Since these cannot literally be statues, we are left wondering what they could be. If the sileneuses were moulds, things would be a bit clearer. The *agalmata* would at least be like statues, since they would be likenesses of Socrates himself as some sort of model or paradigm of temperance. It is a pleasing idea, even if not one on which we can place a great deal of weight—especially once we turn to the third passage.

Confirming the suspicion aroused by the phrase “teems with temperance,” it tells us that the *agalmata* inside Socrates are *agalmata* of virtue, and that they are also inside his arguments:

But the sort of man this is and his strangeness, both himself and his arguments, one couldn't come close to finding if one looked, neither among people present nor past, except perhaps if one were to compare him to those I mention—not any man, but sileneuses and satyrs, him and his arguments. Actually, I left this out at first, that even his arguments are like sileneuses that have been opened. For if one is willing to listen to Socrates' arguments, they'd appear quite ridiculous at first; they're wrapped around on the outside with words and phrases like the hide of an outrageous satyr. He talks about pack asses and smiths and cobblers and tanners ... but if the arguments are opened and one sees them from the inside, he will find first that they are the only arguments with any sense in them, and next that they're the most god-like and contain the most *agalmata* of virtue, and that they are relevant to most or rather to all things worth considering for one who intends to be noble and good.

Symposium 221e1–222a6

Now we are well and truly at sea, since an argument could not literally contain a statue—or a likeness of Socrates either, for that matter.

In the seduction scene, *agalmata* are again present, this time implicit in the response Socrates makes to Alcibiades' sexual overtures:

My dear Alcibiades, you are really not to be taken lightly, if indeed what you say about me happens to be true, and there is in me some power through which you might become better; you would then see inconceivable beauty in me, even surpassing your own immense comeliness of form. But if, seeing it, you are trying to strike a bargain with me to exchange beauty for beauty, then you intend to take no slight advantage of me: on the contrary, you are trying to get possession of what is truly beautiful instead of what merely seems so, and really, you intend to trade bronze for gold.

Symposium 218d7–219a1

The repeated “in me,” the equivalence of “inconceivable beauty” and “marvelously beautiful,” the use of “gold(en)” all serve to make plain that what Alcibiades expects to receive in return for his bronze body are our *agalmata*. Socrates, however, shows no inclination to endorse the claim that these exist: a cautious “if indeed what you say about me happens to be true” is as far as he will go.

How does Alcibiades imagine that these *agalmata* might become his? In the seduction scene, he seems to entertain the fantasy of acquiring them through sexual intercourse: “Believing he was earnestly (*espoudakenai*) pursuing my youthful beauty, I thought it was a stroke of luck and my wonderful good fortune, because by gratifying Socrates I could learn everything he knew” (217a2–5). It is certainly not a fantasy peculiar to him. When Socrates finally arrives at Agathon's, after a sojourn in a neighbor's porch, his host greets him by saying: “Come here, Socrates, and lie down beside me, so that by touching you I'll get the benefit of the wisdom that came to you on the porch” (175c7–d1). The simile with which Socrates responds amplifies the sexual innuendo implicit in the verbs “lie down” (*katakeisthai*) and “touch” (*haptain*):⁶ “It would indeed be well, Agathon, if wisdom were the sort of thing that might flow (*rhein*) from the fuller of us into the emptier if only we touch each other, as water flows through a woolen thread from a fuller into an emptier cup. If wisdom is that way too, I value the place beside you very much indeed; for I think I will be filled from you with wisdom of great

⁶ LSJ cites *Laws* 840a4 and *Aristotle Politics* 1335b40.

beauty" (175d4–e2). As *agalmata* of virtue are fantasized as entering Alcibiades through sexual intercourse, thereby making him "as good as possible" (218d2), so wisdom is fantasized as flowing into Agathon through sexualized contact, making him wise.

Alcibiades' use of the verb "teems" (*gemin*) at 216d7 is both consonant with this picture and helps fill it out. For though *gemin* usually just means "to be filled with," which is its most common meaning in Plato, LSJ lists *kuein* ("to be pregnant") as one of its synonyms. That, no doubt, is why "teems" seemed to R. E. Allen (1991) to be a particularly apposite translation. If Socrates is being imagined as *pregnant* with *agalmata* of virtue, however, the latter are themselves being imagined as embryo-like entities. But embryos, it goes without saying, are genuinely like figurative statues, making *agalmata* an appropriate term for Alcibiades to apply to them.

Though Alcibiades' picture of Socrates as a male pregnant with embryonic virtue is part of a fantasy, it is a fantasy with deep roots in Greek thinking about sexual reproduction. In Aeschylus, for example, Apollo claims that a female serves only as an incubator for an embryo produced exclusively by a male:

She who is called the child's mother is not
Its begetter, but the nurse of the newly sown conception.
The begetter is the male, and she as a stranger for a stranger
Preserves the offspring ...

Eumenides 658–661, trans. Lloyd-Jones

We know from Aristotle's *Generation of Animals* (763b21–23) that a similar theory was advanced by Anaxagoras, who may well have been Aeschylus' source (Sommerstein 1989:206). In a later generation, Diogenes of Apollonia (D-K 64A27) and others also accepted some version of it. It is with this embryological tradition, moreover, that Diotima allies herself earlier in the *Symposium*, when she portrays reproduction as involving pregnant males seeking females in whom to beget the embryo-like entities they are carrying (208e2–3).⁷

Moreover, she develops her account of the type of psychic pregnancy involved in philosophical *paidierastia* or boy-love precisely by analogy with such males:

⁷ The fact that she earlier claims that "all human beings (*anthrōpoi*) are pregnant in respect to both the body and the soul" (206c1–2) may mean that her allegiance is less than wholehearted. But since, in the sequel, only males are ever pregnant in soul, her expression may simply be imprecise: by *anthrōpoi* she means *male* human beings. What that means for her own odd status is another question.

Some men are pregnant in respect to their bodies, and turn more to women and are lovers in that way... Others are pregnant in respect to their soul—for there are those, she said, who are still more fertile in their souls than in their bodies with what it pertains to soul to conceive and bear. What then so pertains? Wisdom and the rest of virtue—of which, indeed, all the poets are procreators, and as many craftsmen as are said to be inventors. But the greatest and most beautiful kind of wisdom by far is that concerned with the correct ordering of cities and households, for which the name is temperance and justice. Whenever, then, one of them is pregnant of soul from youth, being divine, and reaches the age when he then desires to bear and procreate, he too, then, I think, goes about seeking the beauty in which he might beget; for he will never beget in the ugly. Now, because he is fertile, he welcomes beautiful rather than ugly bodies, and should he meet with a beautiful and naturally gifted soul, he welcomes the conjunction of the two even more, and to this person he is straightway resourceful in making arguments about virtue and trying to educate him.

Symposium 208e2–209c1

A man pregnant in respect to his soul, then, is pregnant with embryo-like virtues. What he produces when he meets a beautiful boy are arguments about virtue. And it is these that "make young men better" (210c1–3; cf. 218e1–2). In this respect, too, Alcibiades' portrait unwittingly mimics Diotima's—unwittingly, because he has not heard her speak. For when, as an out-of-order afterthought ("Actually, I left this out at first," 221d8), he also locates the *agalmata* inside Socrates' arguments, he seems to be referring back to an earlier thought in which philosophical discussion not sexual intercourse is the mode of their transmission: "I'd been bitten by something more painful, and in the most painful place one can be bitten—in the heart or soul or whatever one should name it, struck and bitten by arguments in philosophy that hold more fiercely than a serpent, when they take hold of a young and not ill-endowed soul" (218a3–7).

In the critique of writing at the end of the *Phaedrus*, Socrates himself explicitly invokes very similar ideas.⁸ A written argument, he says, like the "offspring of painting," stands there "as if alive." Yet it cannot answer questions or attune itself to the needs of different audiences, and "when it is ill-treated and unjustly abused, it always needs its father to help it; for it is

⁸ Translations are from Rowe 1986.

incapable of defending or helping itself" (275d4–e5). Its "legitimate brother," however, which is "the living and animate argument of the man who knows, of which a written argument would rightly be called a kind of phantom" is "much better and more capable" in all these departments (276a1–9). Then comes a telling contrast:

The sensible farmer who had some seeds he cared about and wanted to bear fruit—would he sow them in earnest (*spoudēi*) during the summer in some garden of Adonis, and delight in watching it become beautiful within eight days, or would he do that for playful purposes (*paidias*) on a feast-day, when he did it at all; whereas for the purposes about which he was in earnest (*espoudaken*), he would make use of the craft of farming and sow them in appropriate soil, being content if what he sowed reached maturity in the eighth month?

Phaedrus 276b1–8⁹

Next, based on the contrast, comes an equally telling analogy. The man who has "[seeds] of knowledge about what is just, and what is beautiful, and what is good" will have "no less sensible an attitude toward his seeds than the farmer" (276c3–5). Thus, when others "resort to other sorts of playful amusements (*paidiais*), watering themselves with symposia," he will amuse himself (*paidias*, 276d2) by writing "stories about justice and the other virtues," so as to "lay up a store of reminders both for himself, when 'he reaches a forgetful old age', and for anyone who is following the same track, and he will be pleased as he watches their tender growth" (276d1–e3). But when "he is in earnest (*spoudē*) about them," he instead, "makes use of the craft of dialectic, and taking a fitting soul plants and sows in it arguments accompanied by knowledge (*met' epistēmēs logous*), which are able to help themselves and the man who planted them, and are not without fruit but contain a seed, from which others grow in other soils, capable of rendering it forever immortal, and making the one who has it as happy as it is possible for a man to be" (276e5–277a4).¹⁰ Living arguments (*logoi*) are now explicitly likened to seeds (*spermata*)—something on which the Stoics, with their *spermatikoi logoi* (seminal principles) will capitalize.¹¹

⁹ Many thanks to Julia Annas for correcting an oversight in my initial account of this passage.

¹⁰ I cannot resist noticing the reference to symposia as amusements that Plato—who else?—would rather write books than attend!

¹¹ See e.g. SVF 1.497, 2.780, 1027, 1074, 3.141. I am grateful to David Sedley for advice on this Stoic doctrine.

Though Alcibiades is not mentioned by name in this section of the *Phaedrus*, he is, I think, lurking in the shadows of Adonis' garden.¹² As part of the *Adōnia*, the feast celebrating the love-affair of Aphrodite and Adonis, and mourning the early death of the latter, women in fifth-century Athens, "sowed seed at midsummer in broken pots and placed these on the rooftops, so that germination was rapidly followed by withering" (OCD ed. 3:12). These were the eponymous gardens. Three things connect them to Alcibiades. First, the fact that the seeds Socrates sowed in him withered quickly: "as soon as I leave [Socrates]," Alcibiades confesses, "I cave in to the honors of the crowd. So I desert him and flee" (216b4–6). Second, the fact that Alcibiades was suspected of involvement in the mutilation of the Herms—statues of the god Hermes—and in the profanation of the Eleusinian Mysteries, both of which occurred in midsummer, right around the *Adōnia*.¹³ The use of the technical term "uninitiated" (*bebēlos*) at *Symposium* 218b6, strongly suggests that Plato had the latter scandal in mind. He uses the odd term *agalma*, I am confident, in part to memorialize the former scandal too. The third and most striking connection to Alcibiades, however, is entirely intertextual. In the *Symposium*, Alcibiades claims that Socrates, while always playing with people about matters of virtue, was in earnest with him about them (216d4–217a6). The *Phaedrus*, in which play and earnestness about such matters are obsessively contrasted, has obvious critical bearing on his claim. Someone who had "arguments accompanied by knowledge" of "what is just, fine, and good" (276c3–4), it says, would never, *except for playful purposes*, sow them in a garden of Adonis like Alcibiades, whose planting-season (adolescence) was long passed by the time Socrates entered his life (cf. *Alcibiades I* 131c5–d8). Socrates, we may infer, either did not possess the sort of knowledge-conferring *agalmata* of virtue Alcibiades describes or (which we can surely rule out) was merely playing with him too.

If, as we should, we seek the specifically social or cultural origins of *logoi* as *spermata/agalmata*, the obvious place to look is the complex ideology of Athenian *paiderastia*, which Diotima explicitly adapts to her philosophical purposes. It is an ideology that seeks to negotiate between ideals of masculinity and the somewhat conflicting reality of male desire. The salient issue is, what is it to be a man?—in the sense of who has manly control of his appetites and desires and who, like a woman or a slave, does not (Davidson 1998:139–182, 250–277). What a boy who desired to be sexually penetrated by his lover was

¹² As he is at *Republic* 494c4–495b7. See Adam (1902).

¹³ See Thucydides 6.27.

in danger of being thought was not primarily a passive penetratee, as Michel Foucault famously argued, but a *katapugōn*, a *kinaidos*, a “sex addict” or “slut” as we might say—someone too enslaved to his appetites, too much of an unfillable or insatiably leaky vessel, to be trusted with citizenly power.¹⁴ Hence the boy’s desire had to be ideologically refigured as something more appropriate—a desire to be a slave to his lover for the sake not of sexual pleasure, but of virtue (184c2–7, 219e3–5). At the same time, the sexual desire of the lover had also to be refigured as educative rather than orgasmic or ejaculatory in intent. Boy-love became implicitly divided, as a result, into what Pausanias calls (good) Uranian love, whose object is the soul and whose aim is to instill virtue in the boy, and (bad) Pandemotic love, whose object is the body and whose aim is sexual pleasure for the lover (180c1–d7). Sexual intercourse and the inculcation of virtue thus become so metonymically related, their conceptual fields so fused, that *spermatikoi logoi* took on the aura of a natural kind.

While the strategy of getting hold of Socrates’ golden *agalmata* through philosophical discussion is less an obvious fantasy than the explicitly sexual strategy we looked at earlier, it has a manifest defect. It does not immediately explain why anything statue-like should be involved in Alcibiades’ conception of the process. Nonetheless, it does add something important. It explains why Alcibiades thinks there is *something* in Socrates that is virtue-relevant—something the sexual strategy allows him to characterize as he does. What generally happens to those who see him in elenctic action, Socrates tells us, is that they infer that he is wise about the subjects on which he examines others (*Apology* 23a3–5). When Alcibiades describes him as “sly and dishonest (*eirōneuomenos*),” and as spending his whole life “playing with people” (216e4–5), he shows himself to have done precisely that. But his description is true only if he believes that Socrates is a disingenuous *eirōn*—an ironist as we riskily say¹⁵—because, like everyone else, he imagines that something like knowledge-conferring *agalmata* must exist in him to account for his elenctic competence. “By gratifying Socrates,” he says, “I could learn everything he knew” (217a4–5).

When Socrates tacitly accepts this description by not objecting, he does so, I surmise, because he understands it as the consequent of a conditional, the antecedent of which the description itself records him as not having corrob-

rated (218e1–2). What he tacitly accepts, then, is just this: “if I have *agalmata* in me, of the sort that provide me with knowledge of virtue, then I am sly and dishonest and do spend my life playing with people.” That he has such knowledge of virtue, however, whether deriving from *agalmata* or not, is something he always denies:

In fact, gentlemen, it’s pretty certainly the god who is really wise, and by his oracle he meant that human wisdom is worth little or nothing. And it seems that when he refers to the Socrates here before you, and uses my name, he makes me an example, as if he were to say: “That one among you is wisest, mortals, who, like Socrates, has recognized that he’s truly worthless where wisdom’s concerned.”

Apology 23a5–b4

Alcibiades’ sense of privilege—“I don’t know whether anyone else has seen the *agalmata* within when he is in earnest and opened up, but I saw them once”—stands diagnosed, then, as a common illusion.

Though as hesitant to claim that he has any knowledge-conferring *agalmata* of virtue within him as that he has any knowledge of virtue itself, Socrates does make an apparently grand epistemic claim in the *Symposium*. “I claim to know nothing,” he insouciantly says, “except *ta erōtika*” (177d8–9). What exactly is he claiming? Literally translated, *ta erōtika* are “the things of love.” But just as *ta phusika* is “[the science of] physics” and *ta politika* is “[the art or craft of] politics,” *ta erōtika* is “the craft of love” (*hē erōtikē technē*)—the one the god Eros gives to Socrates in the *Phaedrus* (257a3–9). And that raises a problem; in fact, two problems. The first is to explain how it can be true, as Socrates puts it, that “I myself honor and surpassingly devote myself to the craft of love and exhort (*parakeleuomai*) others to do the same” (212b5–7). I mean, where do we see him doing *that*? The other is to reconcile his knowing that craft with his general epistemic modesty, with his characterization of himself as wise “in neither a great nor a small way” (*Apology* 21b4–5). How can the man who has no worthwhile wisdom possibly know something as apparently important and difficult as the art or craft of love?

To these questions the *Lysis* offers appealing clues.¹⁶ Hippothales, like a true Socratic, loves beautiful boys and philosophical arguments (203b6–204a3). But what he does to win Lysis’ love is sing eulogies to him. And that, Socrates argues, no master of the craft of love would ever do:

¹⁴ *Problems* 4.23, attributed to Aristotle, but probably dating from the third century BCE, is revelatory in this regard. In men who have “a superfluity of semen” or whose sperm ducts are blocked, semen collects in their rectum, instead of being discharged in the natural way. Unable to find release in normal sexual intercourse, they desire “friction in the place where the semen collects.” But since this doesn’t result in seminal discharge “they are insatiable or unfillable (*aplēston*) just like women.”

¹⁵ See Vlastos 1991:21–44 and Nehamas 1998:19–98 for some risk assessment.

¹⁶ Translations are from Lombardo (1997).

If you make a conquest of a boy like this, then everything you've said and sung turns out to eulogize yourself as victor in having won such a boyfriend. But if he gets away, then the greater your praise of his beauty and goodness, the more you will seem to have lost and the more you will be ridiculed. That is why someone who is wise in the craft of love doesn't praise his beloved until he has him: he fears how the future may turn out. And besides, these beautiful boys get swelled heads if anyone praises them and start to think they're really somebody.

Lysis 205e2–206a4

Convinced, Hippothales turns to Socrates: "What different advice can you give me about what someone should say or do to get his prospective boyfriend to love him?" (206c1–3). Unlike in the *Symposium*, where he is laconic, Socrates goes into detail: "if you're willing to have him talk with me, I might be able to give you a demonstration (*epideixai*) of how to carry on a discussion with him" (206c4–6).¹⁷ An elenctic examination of Lysis quickly ensues.

"This is how you should talk to your boyfriends, Hippothales," Socrates says when the examination is finished, "making them humble and drawing in their sails, instead of swelling them up and spoiling them, as you do" (210e2–5). What he goes on to say about philosophy, however, shows elenctic discussion to be much more than merely chastening (cf. *Symposium* 204a1–b5):

Those who are already wise no longer love wisdom (*philosophein*), whether they are gods or men. Neither do those who are so ignorant that they are bad, for no bad and stupid person loves wisdom. There remains only those who have this bad thing, ignorance, but have not yet been made ignorant and stupid by it. They are conscious of not knowing what they don't know.

Lysis 218a2–b1

By showing Lysis that he isn't already wise, by getting him to recognize that he doesn't know, Socrates is setting him on the right road to love—the one that leads to the love of wisdom, and so to the beautiful itself.¹⁸ Just how that solves Hippothales' problem of getting Lysis to love *him* is another matter—one we will need Diotima's metaphysics to solve.

¹⁷ "Periods of silent absorption," are not, therefore, "the closest Socrates comes to public display, or *epideixis*" (Hunter 2004:33).

¹⁸ Cf. *Sophist* 231b3–8: "the refutation of the empty belief in one's own wisdom is nothing other than our noble sophistry."

As a philosopher himself, Socrates does not know the answers to his own questions about virtue, and so really is "wise in neither a great nor a small way." Yet, unlike those he examines, he knows that he doesn't know, that he lacks wisdom. What gives him that knowledge is the one craft he does possess—the craft of asking questions. It is what makes him a lover of wisdom, therefore, and so is itself the craft of (producing) love. And questioning, of course, is what we do see Socrates devoting himself to and exhorting others to practice (*Apology* 29d2–30a2,¹⁹ 38a1–6). Socrates' claim to know the craft of love reveals a deep truth about him, therefore—so deep, in fact, that it appears to have been encoded in language itself by the possibly divine "rule-setter" who made it: "The name 'hero' (*hērōs*) is only a slightly altered form of the word 'love' (*erōs*)—the very thing from which the heroes sprang. And either this is the reason they were called 'heroes' or else because they were sophists, clever speech-makers and dialecticians, skilled at questioning (*erōtan*)" (*Cratylus* 398c5–e5). Add *eirōn* to the etymological mix, and you have Socrates—questioner, lover, philosopher hero, "ironist"—as truly a gift of the god (*Apology* 30d7 c1)!

The identification of the craft of love with that of asking questions, while compatible with Socrates' usual *modus operandi* and disavowal of wisdom, is not entirely problem free. For Diotima, as the one who taught Socrates the former craft (*Symposium* 201d5), characterizes it as leading to scientific knowledge (211b8–d1). Did Socrates really have wisdom, then, while dishonestly disavowing it? Was Alcibiades right in thinking that he had glimpsed "truly beautiful things" (219a1) within him? Perhaps, it is sufficient here to take a way out suggested by Diotima herself. Socrates, she is fairly confident, could be instructed in part of the craft of love (the so-called "lesser mysteries"), in which the philosophical lover gives birth to beautiful arguments about the virtues when he finds a boy beautiful in body and soul (209a1–c7). But about the part where scientific knowledge of the beautiful is acquired, Diotima is more circumspect: "as for those parts relating to the final revelation [of the beautiful itself], the ones for whose sake I've taught you the others [the "lesser mysteries"], I don't know whether you would be capable of being initiated into *them*" (210a1–2). It is noteworthy that Alcibiades' own characterization of the Socratic arguments he has heard as "wrapped around on the outside with words and phrases like the hide of an outrageous satyr," and as being about "pack asses and smiths and cobblers and tanners," while it fits the arguments we see Socrates giving in the so-called early dialogues, doesn't fit the sublime

¹⁹ Note, especially, *parakeleuomenos* at 29d5.

lessons he learns from Diotima. Like the very fact that Socrates has had to learn them from her, this suggests, as many have argued, that they are not Socratic in provenance, but Platonic—something, as I put it elsewhere, that Plato gave birth to in the beauty of Socrates (Reeve 2004:96).

“A thing that desires, desires what it lacks,” the *Lysis* tells us (221d7–e2). The *Symposium* delivers the same message yet more stridently: “what is not at hand, what is not present, what one does not have, what one is not oneself, and what one lacks—desire and Eros are of such things as these” (200e2–5). In *Republic* IX, this picture of desire gets tied explicitly to the theory of forms. Hunger, thirst, and the like, are “some sorts of emptiness related to the state of the body,” while “foolishness and lack of knowledge” are “some sorts of emptiness related to the state of the soul.” Nourishment fills the former; “true belief, knowledge, understanding, and, in sum, all of virtue,” the latter. But these fillings are not on a par. Nourishment fills temporarily—it is soon digested or excreted; virtue fills permanently, because, as something that always is what it is, it partakes more of “pure being” than nourishment does, and so “is more” than it (585a8–b8). Since the things that are more—that fully are (what they are)—are the Platonic forms (*Republic* 475c6–480a13), it is only when the true lover of boys reaches these—or, more particularly, the beautiful itself—that his desires are satisfied, his emptinesses truly filled, his happiness assured (*Symposium* 210e2–212a7). The elenchus is important to love in part because it reveals the presence of these emptinesses—emptinesses which, because they were concealed or occluded by the false conceit of knowledge, were erotically inert. The revelation of a hunger thereby becomes a sort of feeding: “When a man has his mouth so full of food that he is prevented from eating, and is likely to starve in consequence, does giving him food consist in stuffing still more of it in his mouth or does it consist in taking some of it away, so that he can begin to eat?” (Kierkegaard 1941:245n).²⁰

A philosopher who encounters a boy with “a godlike face or some form of body which imitates beauty well,” Socrates tells us in the *Phaedrus*,²¹ “reveres it like a god as he looks at it, and if he were not afraid of appearing thoroughly mad would sacrifice to his beloved as if to an *agalma* of a god” (251a1–7). In this regard, he is no different from any other recently reincarnated lover who still remembers vividly the forms he glimpsed as he traversed the heavens in the chorus of his patron—because character-defining—god:

So each selects his love from the ranks of the beautiful according to his own disposition, and fashions and adorns him like an *agalma*, as if he were himself his god, in order to honor him and celebrate his mystic rites. And so those who belong to Zeus seek that the one they love should be someone like Zeus in respect of his soul; so they look to see whether he is naturally disposed towards philosophy, and when they have found him and fall in love they do everything to make him of such a kind. So if they have not previously set foot in this way, they undertake it now, both learning from wherever they can and finding out for themselves; and as they follow the scent from within themselves to the discovery of the nature of their own god, they find the means to it through the compulsion on them to gaze intensely on the god, and grasping him through memory, and possessed by him, they take their habits and ways from him, to the extent that it is possible for a man to share in god; and because they count their beloved responsible for these very things they love him still more, and if it is from Zeus that they draw, like Bacchants, they pour the draught over the soul of their loved one and make him as like their god as possible.

Phaedrus 252d5–253b1

Here it is the boy’s face, body, and soul that are *agalmata*, and the philosopher who is drawn by them, through *anamnēsis*, to philosophy, god-likeness, and the philosophical education of his beloved. It is into him, not into the boy, that a strange fluid flows:

“nourishment ... flows in” upon him (*epirruēisēs de tēs trophēs*, 251b5); he “receives the stream of beauty in through the eyes” (*dexamenos gar tou kallous tēn aporroēn dia tōn ommatōn*, 251b1–2); and, as he gazes upon the beauty of the beloved, his soul “receives particles from there that come at him in a stream” (*ekeithen merē epionta kai rheont’ ... dechomenē*, 251c).

Nightingale 2004:159

The effect of such influx is not satiation or filling up, moreover, since the name of the particles (*merē*) that come at (*epionta*) the philosopher in a stream (*rheonta*) is *himeros*—desire (251c6–7). It is these now activated desires, in turn, that eventually lead to the learning and investigation that enable the philosopher to “gaze intently” on Zeus. The fluid he draws like a draught from this divine source is what really nourishes him and what he then pours over the

²⁰ I owe notice of this passage to J. Lear (2004:106–107), a book no student of Socratic irony can afford to miss.

²¹ I am grateful to Diskin Clay for encouraging me to look again at these texts.

soul of his boyfriend (253a6–b1). If the effect of such pouring is to make the latter “as like their god as possible,” we may infer, it must serve as stimulus rather than satisfier for his desires too, leading him to hunger for philosophy, Zeus, and the Platonic forms. The inversion of the description Alcibiades gives—memorialized by the use of the term *agalma*—could hardly be more complete. When he refers to “the madness and Bacchic frenzy of philosophy” (*Symposium* 218b4), therefore, we may be confident that he has in mind not the “parts of madness on the right-hand side” of the definitional division, which are identified with “divine,” non-genital, philosophical love, but those of the bad madness on the left, which are identified with sexual love (*Phaedrus* 266a3–b1).

Even when a philosopher has climbed Diotima’s ladder to the very top and has seen the form of the beautiful, then, *what he has in him for his beloved boy* isn’t what would fill up his emptinesses, but what would activate them, turn them into effective motives to philosophical inquiry. No Platonic philosopher, one might say, no matter how wise and knowledgeable, can ever be more than a Socrates to another person! One must see the forms for oneself. For this reason, too, *agalmata* is a peculiarly appropriate term to use for what such a philosopher does have in him. For an *agalma* originally had no “relation whatsoever to the idea of resemblance or imitation, of figural representation in the strict sense.” Instead, it was something the aim of which was “to construct a bridge, as it were,” that would reach “toward the divine.” Yet “at the same time and in the same figure,” it had to “mark its distance from that domain in relation to the human world.” It had to make the divine power present, yet it had also to emphasize “what is inaccessible and mysterious in divinity, its alien quality, its otherness” (Vernant 1991:152–153). Like what is in a Platonic philosopher for another, *agalmata* are a bridge to something else—an image for what is itself necessarily beyond images (*Symposium* 212a4–5).

The idea of *agalmata* as a bridge between human and divine is bound to remind us of Diotima’s characterization of Eros as a *daimōn*—a being “intermediate between god and mortal” (202d11–e1). “Ever poor,” “rough and hard,” “unshod,” “dwelling ever with want,” “courageous,” and “a lover of wisdom through the whole of life,” Eros sounds remarkably similar to Socrates himself (203c6–d8), whom Alcibiades actually describes as a “genuine *daimōn*” (219b7–c1). But that implies that Socrates is, in the relevant respect, also remarkably similar to an *agalma*, and it to him. Like the conjecture mentioned earlier that Alcibiades’ openable silenuses are really statue moulds, this has the effect of turning the *agalmata* inside Socrates into statues of himself. Though Alcibiades claims to have seen these *agalmata* before he tried to seduce Socrates, it is

noteworthy that in the penultimate section of his speech, it is the figure of Socrates as a model of virtue that is front and center. Whether in resisting Alcibiades’ beautiful body, or on campaign at Potidaea or Delium, *he* is the paradigm of wisdom, temperance, fortitude, and courage (219d3–221c1).

The phrase *euporei logon peri arētes* (“resourceful in making arguments about virtue”), applied by Diotima to the pregnant and properly philosophical lover of boys (209b8), finds a parallel in Alcibiades’ last words about Socrates, which are also, in fact, his last words *sans phrase*: “It’s the same old story ... When Socrates is around, it’s impossible for anyone else to get a share of the beauties. Now, too, see how resourcefully (*euporōs*) he’s found a convincing argument (*logon*) to make this fellow [Agathon] lie down beside him” (223a6–9). They are words carefully prepared for. “Was I not prophetic,” Socrates says, “when I said just now that Agathon would speak wonderfully and I would be at a loss (*aporēsoimi*).” “As to you being at a loss (*aporēsein*),” Eryximachus replies, “I doubt it.” “And how am I not to be at a loss (*aporein*),” Socrates responds, using the verb for the third time, “after so beautiful and so varied a speech” (198a5–b3). In Diotima’s story of Poros and Penia, we discover how potentially deceptive they are:

Because Eros is the son of Poros and Penia, this is his fortune: first, he is ever poor, and far from being delicate and beautiful, as most people suppose, he on the contrary is rough and hard and unshod, ever lying on the ground without bedding, sleeping in doorsteps and beside roads under the open sky. Because he has his mother’s nature he dwells ever with lack. But on the other hand, by favor of his father, he ever plots for good and beautiful things, because he is courageous, eager and intense, and a clever hunter ever weaving some new device, desiring wisdom and capable of it, a philosopher through the whole of life, clever at enchantment, a sorcerer, and a sophist. And he is by nature neither mortal nor immortal, but sometimes on the same day he lives and flourishes, whenever he is resourceful (*euporēsēi*), but then he dies and comes back to life again by reason of the nature of his father, though what is provided (*porizomenon*) ever flows away, so that Eros is never rich nor at a loss (*aporei*), and is, on the contrary, in between wisdom and ignorance. For things stand thus: no god loves wisdom or desires to become wise—for he is so; nor, if anyone else is wise, does he love wisdom. On the other hand, neither do the ignorant love wisdom nor desire to become wise; for ignorance is difficult just in this, that though

not beautiful and good, nor wise, it yet seems to itself to be sufficient. He who does not think himself in need does not desire what he does not think he lacks.

Symposium 203c5–204a7

Just as Socrates turns Athenian *paidēra* upside down by playing the part of the pursued boy rather than of the pursuing older lover (222b3–4), the source of *agal-mata* rather than their recipient, so, by means of his skill at asking questions, he turns *aporia* into *euporia*, emptiness into a resource. What as a philosopher he desires, however, isn't to lie down with Agathon ("Mr. Goodman"), as Alcibiades claims, but to have intercourse with the Platonic form that shares his—much punned upon—name. Alcibiades' suggestion otherwise is a genuine profanation of mysteries—not the Eleusinian this time, but the philosophical ones Diotima has modeled on them (see Sheffield 2001b).

One might say the same, I think, about the way Alcibiades experiences the *aporia* Socrates induces in him:

I wrapped my own cloak around him—for it was winter—and I lay down on his threadbare coat, and I put my two arms around this genuine *daimōn*, this wonderful man, and lay there the whole night through. And, again, Socrates, you will not say I speak falsely. But when I did this, he was so contemptuous of my youthful bloom that he ridiculed and outrageously insulted it; and in that regard, at least, I thought I was really something, gentlemen and judges—for you are judges of the arrogance of Socrates—for know well, by gods and by goddesses, when I arose after having slept with Socrates, it was nothing more than if I'd slept with a father or with an elder brother. Can you imagine my state of mind after that? I considered myself affronted, and yet I admired his nature, his temperance and courage, having met a man of a sort I never thought to meet in respect to wisdom and fortitude. The result was that I could neither get angry and be deprived of his company nor was I resourceful enough (*ēuporoun*) to win him over. For I well knew he was far more invulnerable to money than Ajax was to iron, and he'd escaped me in the only way I thought he could be caught. So I was at a loss (*ēporoun*), and went around enslaved by this man as no one ever was by any other.

Symposium 219b5–e5

What should be experienced as a resource that can lead to the forms of the good or the beautiful is instead experienced as a genuine loss, recoupable only by gaining possession, through seduction or bribery (the only genuine resources Alcibiades seems to recognize), of Socrates himself, and the *agal-mata*-based wisdom he is imagined to contain. The idea that Socrates' love could be won only through joining him in leading the philosophically examined life seems hopelessly far away.

An important passage in *Republic* VI strongly suggests that this negative interpretation of Alcibiades is very much a part of Plato's own. In it Socrates is explaining why philosophers have an undeservedly bad reputation, and what the real effect is on their souls of contemplating Platonic forms:

The harshness of the masses towards philosophy is caused by those outsiders who do not belong and who have burst in like a *band of revelers* (*epeiskekōmakotas*), *abusing one another*, indulging their love of quarreling, and *always arguing about human beings—something that is least appropriate in philosophy* ... For surely, someone whose mind is truly directed towards the things that are has not the leisure to look down at human affairs, and be filled with malice and hatred as a result of entering into their disputes. Instead, as he looks at and contemplates things that are orderly and always the same, that neither do injustice to one another nor suffer it, being all in a rational order, he imitates them and tries to become as like them as he can. Or do you think there is any way to prevent someone from associating with something he admires without imitating it? ... Then the philosopher, by associating with what is *orderly* (*kosmōi*) and *divine* becomes as *divine* and *orderly* as a human being can. Though, mind you, there is always plenty of *slander* (*diabolē*) around.

Republic 500b1–d2

Alcibiades, notice, accuses Socrates of "abusing" him (*Symposium* 213d2), and then proceeds to give a speech entirely about human beings, which is therefore as anti-the-philosopher-Socrates as possible. No wonder, then, that it is represented by the latter as slanderous in intent: "as though you hadn't said it all to sow slander (*diaballein*) between me and Agathon" (222c7–d1; also 222d6). Finally, there is the "crowd of revelers (*kōmastas*)" that shows up at the end of the *Symposium* (223b1–2) and, finding Agathon's doors as "open" (223b3) as Alcibiades thought he had found Socrates, bursts in and puts an end to all "order (*kosmōi*)" (223b4–5). The echoes are surely too insistent to be accidental.

The order the revelers literally destroy is that established by Eryximachus in his role as master of ceremonies—"I think each of us should make as beautiful a speech as he can in praise of Eros, from left to right (*epi dexia*)" (177d1-2). When Alcibiades arrives late at the party, Eryximachus tries to impose it on him too:

Before you came, it seemed best that each of us, from left to right (*epi dexia*) should give the most beautiful speech about Eros he could and offer an encomium. The rest of us have all spoken; but since you haven't and you've finished your drink, you ought to speak too. Once you've done so, you can prescribe for Socrates as you wish, and he for the man on his right (*epi dexia*), and so on for the rest.

Symposium 214b9-c5

As we have seen, however, Alcibiades does not really follow the rule, since he speaks not about Eros, but a human being (214d2-10)—albeit one who is like Eros. Later, however, when Aristodemus wakes up, he finds order restored: "only Agathon and Aristophanes and Socrates were still awake, drinking from a large bowl, and passing it from left to right (*epi dexia*)" (223c4-5). I take this to imply that Alcibiades and the crowd of revelers—and the disorder they represent—have gone. But perhaps, like some others, they have simply gone to sleep.

This order, this movement of love (or of the *logoi* about it) around Agathon's table, is literally symposiastic, but it is also allegorical. It is related, first and most obviously, to the order discerned in love by dialectic in the *Phaedrus*, where, as we saw good philosophical love is identified with the parts of madness "on the right-hand side (*dexiai*)" of the definitional division (266a3-b1). But it is also related to "the movement of the Same," which the Demiurge in the *Timaeus* "made revolve toward the right (*epi dexia*) by way of the side" (36c5-6). For like dialectic, and the divisions and collections of which Socrates proclaims himself a lover (*Phaedrus* 266b3-4), this movement, too, is associated with philosophy: "whenever an argument concerns an object of reason, and the circle of the Same runs well (*euporos*) and reveals it, the necessary result is understanding and knowledge" (*Timaeus* 37c1-3).

What these allegorical aspects of *epi dexia* mean within the *Symposium* emerges when we turn to Diotima's philosophical demythologizing of the story of Poros and Penia discussed above. If those already filled with wisdom, and so touching all the Platonic forms, neither love nor desire anything, what happens to the philosopher who reaches the goal of education in the craft of

love? Is his love wrecked by its very success? In Diotima's view, the answer is no. The philosopher's desire, like that of all lovers, isn't to possess the beautiful or the good for a moment, but to have it be his "forever" (206a3-13). Concealed in every desire or love, therefore, is "the love of immortality" (207a3-4). But the closest a mortal creature can come to gratifying *that* love is a far cry from the permanent satisfaction achieved by the gods:

Mortal nature seeks so far as it can to exist forever and be immortal. It can do so only in this way, by giving birth, ever leaving behind a different new thing in place of the old, since even in the time in which each single living creature is said to live and be the same—for example, as a man is said to live and be the same from youth to old age—though he never has the same things in himself, he nevertheless is called the same, but he is ever becoming new while otherwise perishing, in respect to hair and flesh and bone and blood and the entire body. And not only in respect to the body but also in respect to the soul, its character and habits, opinions, desires, pleasures, pains, fears are each never present in each man as the same, but some are coming to be, others perishing. Much more extraordinary still, not only are some items of knowledge coming to be and others perishing in us, and we are never the same even in respect to items of knowledge, but also each single one among the items of knowledge is affected in the same way. For what is called practicing exists because knowledge leaves us; forgetting is departure of knowledge, but practice, by introducing a new memory in place of what departs, preserves the knowledge so that it seems to be the same. For it is in this way that all that is mortal is preserved: not by being ever completely the same, like the divine, but by leaving behind, as it departs and becomes older, a different new thing of the same sort that it was. By this device ... what is mortal has a share of immortality both body and everything else; but what is immortal by another device.²²

Symposium 207d1-208b4

²² It is an interesting question whether this account applies to all parts of the human soul in all circumstances, or only, as the *Republic* suggests, to the "form it takes in human life," when, encrusted with bodily appetites, its true nature, like that of the sea-god Glaucus, is disguised (612a5-6). If, when separate from the body and the other elements present in the embodied soul, the rational element is truly immortal and divine, truly a vessel from which knowledge never leaks away, then what applies to the gods will apply also to it.

Thus, when the philosopher reaches the beautiful itself, his task, just because he is mortal, is by no means complete. To stay in touch with the beautiful, each item of knowledge that is his knowing or contemplation of it must give birth to another like it—just as, if he himself is to stay alive, each of his person-stages or time-slices, as we call them, must give birth to another.

One effect of this way of thinking, as Derek Parfit has famously argued in our own time, is to blur or soften the distinction between self and others, and with it the distinction between egoism and altruism (Parfit 1984:199–347). There is little doubt, I think, that Plato is aware of this effect and seeks to exploit it. What a philosopher begets in the true beauty of the beautiful itself, is the good thing that is his own “true virtue.” And it is with the nurturing of it that he is first concerned. Since he is a changing or metabolizing creature, however, what he has to do to remain virtuous—to keep that good thing—is to give birth to a later stage of himself that is virtuous too. This later self, as a case of possessing good things himself, is also something he loves, and for the same reason as he loves his present self as such a case: when a person becomes virtuous, the *Republic* tells us, he thereby “becomes his own friend (*philon genomenon heautōi*)” (443d5).²³ Pregnant with virtue, then, and ever ready to give birth to it in true beauty, the philosopher meets a boy that he, using the beautiful itself as his standard of beauty (211d3–5), finds beautiful, and so “seeks to educate.” That is, he seeks to make the boy, too, a virtuous lover of wisdom—something “of the same sort” as himself. If he succeeds, the boy will be his “offshoot” (208b4–6), and will be loved as his own future selves are loved, and for exactly the same reason—the boy stands to him (to his present self) precisely as they do. Egoism has moved closer to altruism; self-interest to something more impersonal. If we look at this from the point of view of the boy, we can see why Socrates’ elenctic demonstrations do show Hermogenes how to get Lysis to love *him*. An elenchus of another is always at the same time, Socrates claims, a self-examination (*Apology* 38a4–5, *Charmides* 166c7–d2, *Gorgias* 506a3–5). Thus if Hermogenes, like Lysis, is a nascent philosopher, their elenctic conversations will make each the other’s second self, every bit as much beloved as the first.²⁴ The true path to gaining Socrates’ love is thus laid out.

“I think,” says Diotima, “that in touching *tou kalou* and holding familiar intercourse *autōi*, he bears and begets what he has long since been pregnant

with” (209c2–4). Is it the boy or the beautiful she’s talking about? A happy ambiguity (*tou kalou* and *autōi* could be either masculine or neuter) allows her to superimpose on one another, as it were, what I have presented as two separate events—the philosopher’s giving birth in the true beauty of the beautiful itself to *what we would all intuitively consider* to be his own later self, and his giving birth in a beautiful boy to *what Diotima’s own theory of the self* invites us to see as such.

As prominent in the *Symposium* as the fourfold repetition of *epi dexia*, and as deeply associated with Alcibiades, is the fourfold repetition of *exaiphnēs* (“all of a sudden”): *exaiphnēs*, the true lover catches sight of the beautiful itself (210e4–5); *exaiphnēs*, Alcibiades arrives at Agathon’s house (212c6); *exaiphnēs*, Socrates turns up in Alcibiades’ life (213c1); *exaiphnēs*, the crowd of revelers burst in (223b2–6). What suddenly turns up in each case is a candidate object of love: the beautiful itself for the philosopher’s love; Alcibiades for Socrates’; Socrates for Alcibiades’. As for the crowd (*pampollous*) of revelers, they are the object that successfully competes with Socrates for Alcibiades’ love, since it is to “the honors of the crowd (*tōn pollōn*)” that Alcibiades caves in when not by Socrates’ side (216b4–6).

For what suddenly turns up—what lands the *coup de foudre*—to be truly beautiful, however, to be what is really loved, it has to come at the right place in an order that is, first and foremost, an education-induced order in the lover’s own soul. This is something on which Diotima is insistent:

It is necessary for him who proceeds correctly in this matter to begin while still young by going to beautiful bodies; and first, if his guide guides correctly ... he who has been educated in the craft of love up to this point, beholding beautiful things in the correct order (*ephexēs*)²⁵ and way, will then suddenly, in an instant, proceeding at that point to the goal of the craft of love, see something marvelous, beautiful in nature.

Symposium 210a4–e5

But the importance of proper order doesn’t end there. To stay in touch with the beautiful itself, the psychological order thus acquired must be sustained. Like Socrates’ own fabled orderliness it must be of a sort that neither wine, nor sexual desire, nor extremes of hot or cold, nor lack of sleep, nor normal human weakness can disrupt. Expressed figuratively as a movement, it must be that of the circle of the Same.

²⁵ The word Alcibiades uses to describe what his description of Socrates will precisely not manifest.

²³ Thanks to Jim Lesher for reminding me of this text.

²⁴ In Reeve 1992a:173–183, I argue that we should understand Aristotle’s views on virtuous friends in a similar way. Such friends are each other’s “second selves” in part because they help produce one another as virtuous.

With one clear exception, prior to the arrival of Alcibiades, Eryximachus' left-to-right order is followed until all those present have spoken (214c2). The clear exception is Aristophanes.²⁶ He should have spoken after Pausanias, but he got the hiccups, and so yielded his turn to Eryximachus, who praises orderly, harmonious, pious, temperate love, while condemning "the Pandemotic Eros of the many-tuned Muse Polyhymnia."²⁷ Comedy, which Aristophanes represents, is thus presented as a backward turn, a step in as anti-philosophical a direction as the "satyr play—or rather Silenus play" of Alcibiades (222d3–4). As in real life, so in the *Symposium*, neither Aristophanes nor Alcibiades is a true friend or lover of Socrates.

I said at the beginning that Alcibiades' portrait of Socrates is the theatrical apogee of the *Symposium*. That we find it so is a measure of how interesting we find Socrates as a person, and "human affairs" more generally—how much we like laughter, intoxication, disorder. It is an interest that aligns us with the anonymous friends of Apollodorus whose desire to hear about what happened at Agathon's house results, as we are invited to suppose, in our interest being gloriously satisfied. Yet the *Symposium*, of which the story of Apollodorus and his friends is a part, diagnoses that interest as dangerously un-philosophical, as potentially an interest in the wrong things. It isn't Socrates we should be interested in, but philosophy and the forms. Alcibiades' speech is filled with human interest. There is no doubt about that. Yet, as neither *euporōs* nor *ephexēs* nor *epi dexia*, it is the work of an unreliable narrator—the product of a life which, torn between shame and the desire for the approval of the masses (216b3–6), self-confessedly does not itself run well (*ēporoun*, 219e3). In part because of the conceptual-density of the term *agalmata* and the skill with which Plato exploits it, however, there is a reading of the speech in which the image it presents of Socrates is uncannily correct. Socrates and his arguments do have *agalmata* of virtue in them. Just not ones that, like a randy lover's embryo-containing semen, are there for the easy taking. To get hold of *them*, you must change your life.

²⁶ The unclear case is Aristodemus, the narrator, who, because he is lying next to Eryximachus (175a3–5), should presumably have spoken after him had Aristophanes not take his turn.

²⁷ Note *kosmos* at 187a5, d5, 188a3, c3, 189a3.

Seven

Where is Socrates on the "Ladder of Love"?

Ruby Blondell

On the Road

WHERE IS [SOCRATES]?" Agathon asks Aristodemus, when the latter shows up at his house a couple of pages into Plato's *Symposium* (174c12). Later Alcibiades tacitly likens Socrates to Odysseus (220c), the archetypal wanderer, thus obliquely raising the question of where he is in his larger "travels."¹ Travel language runs through the *Symposium* from the first sentence (or more accurately, the second) to the last, when Socrates' intellectual and physical wanderings end at a (temporary) point of rest. Diotima's famous image of the "ladder of love" forms, as it were, the climax of this system of imagery.² In Greek texts generally, and Plato in particular, such images carry a complex set of associations, ranging over intellectual discovery, the sequential steps of an argument or narrative, education, the struggle for virtue (often on an uphill path), and the course of life itself.³ Travel with

¹ For Plato's Socrates as a wanderer, like the Homeric Odysseus, in search of his true "home", see Blondell 2002:158–159; cf. also Montiglio 2005:151–155. Alcibiades' particular allusions, to *Odyssey* iv 242 and 271, would suggest that Socrates is far from reaching home, since they both refer to events at Troy. The first reference is particularly suggestive in the context of the *Symposium*, since it tells of Odysseus disguising himself with a beggar's ugly exterior, which only one person (Helen) can see through (*Odyssey* iv 240–250). Socrates himself alludes to the *Odyssey* at 198b–c (cf. Rosen 1987:204).

² On the "ladder of love" as a mystic's journey, see especially Nightingale 2004:83–86. "Love" is an inadequate translation of the Greek *erōs* (see Halperin 1985:161–163). Moreover the ascent is more like a staircase than a ladder, since it leaves room on each step for company (which suits the Socratic model of "leadership," as we shall see) and suggests ascent to a temple and thus to divinity. But the traditional phrase remains more euphonious than "staircase of passionate desire."

³ See Montiglio 2005. As Nightingale has recently argued (2004), the theoric journey is of particular significance for philosophical inquiry. For the "path" of dialectic, cf. Nightingale 2004:108–

PLATO'S *SYMPOSIUM*

ISSUES IN INTERPRETATION AND RECEPTION

Edited by

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