

start again. That itself, it seems to me, is the chief point of the whole dialogue: to celebrate the distance that separates Socrates from his audience, and from the rest of us.³²

Two

The Role of the Earlier Speeches in the *Symposium*: Plato's Endoxic Method?

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IT IS WELL KNOWN that there are deep and important differences between Plato and Aristotle. One of these concerns the status and role of *endoxa* in philosophical inquiry. Although Aristotle appears to find value in the *endoxa*, that is in “the things which are accepted by everyone, or by most people; or by the wise—either by all of them, or by most, or by the most famous and distinguished” (*Topics* 1.1.100b21–3), the Platonic dialogues appear quite regularly to degrade the opinions of both the majority and the so-called “wise.”² Such views do not appear to make a constructive and positive contribution to philosophical inquiry. One may begin to question this difference on encountering the *Symposium*, however. First, the symposium as a setting for this work was, what we might call, a prime *endoxic* forum. It was a gathering of the intellectual elite of the day and it is to be expected that they will deliver reputable opinions, backed up by the authority of ancient tradition or current expertise. Agathon's banquet is no exception. As has often been noted, those present are broadly representative of a wide variety of Greek wisdom.³ Second, Plato pres-

¹ I would like to thank all the participants at the *Symposium* conference in Washington for much stimulating feedback on this paper, especially Jim Leshner who provided helpful written comments. The paper has also benefited from discussions with Peter Adamson, Arif Ahmed, Charles Brittain, Ben Morison, Hendrik Lorenz, and Zena Hitz.

² On this contrast see, for example, Nussbaum 1986:242–243 who argues that “It is Plato who most explicitly opposes *phainomena*, and the cognitive states concerned with them, to truth and genuine understanding ... Whereas Aristotle finds his truth inside what we say, see and believe, Plato finds his ‘far from the beaten path of human beings’ (in Plato's words) ‘out there’.” See also Solmsen 1968:52: “What sets the Platonic dialectician apart from the majority of professionals is that he has resolutely turned his back on opinion; his entire concern is with reality and truth. Yet Aristotle's dialectical syllogisms draw their persuasive force from *endoxa*.” Cf. also Owen 1986:155.

³ See, for example, Bury 1932:lvii and Rowe 1998a:9.

³² The introduction of parts of the soul, in *Republic* IV, then marks the moment when Plato distances himself from the Socratic psychology—even while, as I have suggested, he manages to preserve some central features of it. The *Phaedrus* is, in part, his new account of *erōs*, written from a *Republic* or post-*Republic* viewpoint, and acknowledging the possibility of bad as well as good *erōs* (for which—as Anthony Price and I agree, on different grounds—the theory of the *Symposium* leaves no room). But that is another story (one told, at least in summary form, at Penner and Rowe 2005:307–312).

ents us with five accounts on the topic of *erōs* before that of the philosopher, and so invites us to consider just what relationship is supposed to hold between the realm of so-called expert opinion and philosophical insight.⁴ And third, as I hope to show, there is, in fact, much continuity between the two. Some account of this needs to be given, and it is the purpose of this paper to explore the nature of this continuity and to determine what philosophical reasons there might be for constructing the dialogue in this way. In so doing I hope to contribute to the controversial issue of how to read the *Symposium*, and what significance is to be assigned to each speech preceding that given by Socrates.

1. The Speeches

The aim of each speaker at Agathon's symposium is to offer an encomium to *erōs* which amounts to showing that it is a good thing and has good effects. The first task will be to outline the central claims of each speaker. This will necessarily be selective since I am concerned here with what relationship, if any, the speeches have to a philosophical account. Before exploring that relationship, though, we shall see that there is a significant degree of interplay between the previous speeches themselves.

We begin with Phaedrus (178a6–180b8), whose central claim is that *erōs* has the most power when it comes to the acquisition of virtue and happiness (178c3–d1; 179a8; 180b6–8). This power is apparently due to the fact that *erōs* can instill a feeling of shame at shameful things and a love of honor in the case of fine ones (178d1). The connection between an erotic relationship, an appreciation of the *kalon*, and a striving for virtue will prove crucial to a proper account of the benefits of *erōs*. For if it is the case that *erōs* can instill a love of the *kalon*, and it is the case that this is necessary for virtue,

⁴ I am not here going to defend reading Socrates' speech as a piece of philosophical insight in any detail. For the purposes of this paper I note only that Socrates presents his account as one that aims for the truth and, in this respect, contrasts it with those of his peers (198–199). Further, he presents himself as an expert on "erotic matters" (198d1, cf. 177d8). One may object that Socrates also claims that his wisdom is as debatable as a dream (174e4). One way to combine these two claims is to suppose that having knowledge of erotic matters is knowing how *erōs* is best satisfied (by the attainment of knowledge and virtue in the ascent). And claiming that one knows how to become virtuous is clearly not the same as claiming that one has achieved this (i.e. that one has knowledge of the form of beauty). This, I submit, is the kind of knowledge Socrates disclaims when Agathon attempts to "lay hold" of some substantive bit of knowledge from Socrates (175d1), and not the knowledge of "erotic matters" (viz. the proper aims and activity of *erōs*) to which he elsewhere lays claim. Compare Socrates in the *Republic*: he can provide an account of an ascent to the form of the good, but disclaims knowledge of the form of the good. For further discussion of this issue see Sheffield:2006.

then it will have been shown that *erōs* has positive potential. But we have little sense at this point of how a love relationship can instill an appreciation of the *kalon*, and what beautiful things lead to virtue, rather than, say, idle staring or sex. According to Phaedrus such relationships foster a love of honor, and it is the realization of this aim in our erotic pursuits that motivates such action (178d2–d). But it is unclear what this appreciation of the *kalon* involves such that it arouses this aim, and why it is that *erōs* aims at honor, rather than at sex or wisdom, for example. We need to know just what sort of *erōs* can lead to this end in particular, and why it does so.

Pausanias' speech (180c3–185c3) builds on Phaedrus' idea that *erōs* can lead to the acquisition of virtue (cf. 185b1–c1), but argues that not all *erōs* issues in the benefits Phaedrus claimed (180c4–5). Beneficial *erōs* privileges the soul over the body (183c1). Attraction to a beautiful soul will be concerned to encourage the development of the soul and its characteristic virtues (184c3–4). Pausanias suggests that cultivating wisdom is intimately related to virtue (184d1–2) and that the best relationship occurs "when the lover is able to help the man become wiser and better, and the young man is eager to be improved by his lover" (184e). If virtue is intimately connected to wisdom (a relationship that remains to be clarified), then one can begin to grasp why *erōs* must be focused on the areas responsible for its realization: the soul. What stands in need of clarification is the nature of this wisdom and how it is best cultivated. Why Pausanias advocates a slavish model whereby a beloved should submit himself to instruction in exchange for his charms is not at all clear (184c3).

Eryximachus agrees with Phaedrus and Pausanias that the aim of *erōs* is virtue (188d5–9), and with Pausanias' distinction between *erōs* for the body and that for the soul (186a1–2). He adds that the correct lover must have an expertise. An expert lover is one with moderation and justice who embodies harmony and enables us to associate both with each other and with the gods (188d8–9). The medical art (186c5–6), music, prophecy, and astronomy (187c2–3) are cited as examples of such expertise. The connection between the harmonious order promoted by these *technai* and the development of these virtues is not so clear, however (188d5); nor are his reasons for emphasizing these *technai* in particular. We need more details about this knowledge of "*ta erōtika*" (188d2).

Aristophanes' speech "fills in," as he puts it, an important gap in the accounts thus far. In order to appreciate why *erōs* has such "healing" and beneficial effects for human beings we need an account of human nature and its needs; for *erōs* is a "doctor to our ills" (189d1). Human beings are apparently incomplete and needy creatures who strive towards a state of self-real-

ization and happiness. If there is to be an erotic expertise, it must involve the ability to discern what these deficiencies are—what it is that we are lacking—and how they should best be remedied by finding the appropriate partner. For Aristophanes this resides in the *oikeion*, what is akin to ourselves, and it is to be found in another person. Union with the right other half will bring us *eudaimonia* (193d5). Why *eudaimonia* resides in the *oikeion* as such is unclear.

Agathon also sees an important omission thus far. The previous speakers have discussed the benefits to human beings for which *erōs* is responsible, but they have failed to explain the sort of nature responsible for those benefits (194e5–8). *Eros* is in every way supremely beautiful and virtuous (196b5); he mentions justice (195b–c), moderation (196c5), courage (d1) and wisdom (d5). Agathon “takes his turn in honoring his own expertise as Eryximachus honored his” (196e1–2) and picks out wisdom in particular, which he identifies with poetic expertise. Because *Eros* is so beautiful himself he pursues beauty and induces others to good and beautiful things, such as wisdom and virtue (196e5–6)—particularly to poetry, or some other creative endeavor (196e1–2). According to this account, then, it is the intimate relationship between *erōs* and beauty that leads to the productive effects the speakers praised. Although this will prove to be a promising idea, we have little sense at this stage why *erōs* for beauty issues in the *production* of good things, rather than in their *possession*. Further, since lovers are here characterized as already in possession of almost all the good things one can imagine, it is not clear why they should engage in such erotic-cum-creative endeavor at all. This aspect of the account is certainly inconsistent with the needy nature of desiring agents described by Aristophanes. Are we to suppose that we desire the beauty we already possess? Or (with Aristophanes) the things we lack?

Taken together these ethical reflections upon the role of *erōs* in the good life present some plausible ideas, as we shall see from their use in Socrates’ account, albeit ones that are incomplete, or that require further clarification for those who would like to have a clear and consistent account.⁵ Although each speaker criticizes his predecessor in some way, they also incorporate elements of their speeches and supplement certain features of their accounts. This is explicit at numerous points.⁶ This manner of supplementing and building on

⁵ And this will not, of course, be everyone. There are many merits to the speeches and other criteria they can be measured by which may not involve clarity and consistency (e.g. literary finesse, humor etc.). I am concerned here with what relationship, if any, they have to a *philosophical* account of *erōs* and that will be one in which clarity and consistency are important criteria.

⁶ Eryximachus claimed that Pausanias failed to bring his speech to a close (186a), and is concerned that he, too, may “have left out many things in my praise of *erōs*, but that was certainly

one’s predecessors lends itself to reading the speeches as one “intertextual web,” a characteristic feature of sympotic discourse.⁷ The accounts of each are incomplete, but taken together they can be seen as parts of an overall picture of the role of *erōs* in the good life. Phaedrus explains that the aim of *eros* is virtue. Pausanias adds that it is *erōs* for the soul that can achieve the virtue he praised, since this is associated with some kind of wisdom, in particular. Eryximachus adds that the correct application of such *erōs* must be governed by knowledge. Aristophanes “fills in” with an account of human nature and its deficiencies which attempts to explain why *erōs* has such beneficial effects. And Agathon attempts to explain these beneficial effects as creative expressions that result from an encounter with the *kalon*, towards which *erōs* is essentially related.⁸

In addition to their incompleteness, there are many puzzles and inconsistencies for those who would like to have a clear and consistent account of *erōs*. Phaedrus presents the idea that *erōs* can lead to the acquisition of virtue by instilling a sense of shame and a striving towards the *kalon*. But he leaves us wondering just what the connection is between an erotic relationship, an appreciation of the *kalon* and a striving for virtue. Pausanias agrees that *erōs* can lead to virtue, but goes on to argue that it is only *erōs* which privileges the soul over the body and, as a consequence, is concerned to encourage the devel-

not my intention. If I have left anything out, it is up to you Aristophanes to fill in the gaps” (188e). After Aristophanes, there is a concern that Agathon and Socrates might be at a loss for things to say because of “the many and various things that have already been said” (193e5–7). But Agathon rises to the challenge and hopes to deliver a complete and unbeatable performance: “let me leave nothing out,” he says at the start (196d5).

⁷ See Stehle 1997:222, from whom I take the phrase. Commenting on sympotic discourse more generally, Stehle argues that: “All of the forms that this might take, the singing in turn, the new turn on the known song, are designed to keep the discourse collective, while at the same time highlighting each person’s contribution. The participants must constantly respond to one another, but the full forms ... require the work of more than one contributor. One could say that ideally the symposium should create one intertextual web.” As Rowe 1998a:8 argues, the responsiveness in this case takes the form of competitiveness, a prominent feature of *encomia* in the fifth and fourth centuries (on which see Nightingale 1995:117).

⁸ Compare Rowe 1998a:8 who argues that: “The capping effect of the first five speeches means that they already, in a sense, represent a single whole, culminating first in the speech of Agathon ... and then in Socrates’ contribution ... But we should be wary of supposing that there is, or is meant to be, any sense of a gradually developing picture of *erōs* ... with each speaker fitting new and better pieces to the jigsaw. Socrates, after all, prefaces his account with a general criticism of the others, and proceeds immediately to reduce Agathon’s speech—which everyone else thought brilliant—to rubble. It is in any case hard to construct a joint account that might emerge from the sequence from Phaedrus to Agathon. All five are essentially individual contributions, with each attempting to go one better than the one before in an apparently haphazard way.” The view being developed here implies that the relationship is not quite so haphazard.

opment of the soul and its characteristic virtues—particularly wisdom—that can lead to that end. But we are left wondering about the relationship between wisdom and virtue, and how a love relationship is supposed to foster that end. Eryximachus argues that the correct application of *erōs* must be governed by knowledge. But it is not clear what knowledge of *ta erotika* consists in, nor why it is associated with the particular *technai* he cites. Aristophanes' account of human nature and its deficiencies leaves us wondering why we should desire the *oikeion*, and whether there is anything particularly beneficial about being welded together with another person. And Agathon invites us to consider why *erōs* for the *kalon* is productive of good things, and whether (and, if so, why) it is a state of plenitude that motivates this beneficial and productive *erōs*. If lovers are already in a state of plenitude it is not clear why they should engage in such erotic endeavors at all.

Significant issues and questions relating to the role of *erōs* in the good life emerge from reflection upon this “web,” which highlights where the agreements and the disagreements are on the subject of *erōs*.⁹ The previous speeches seem to agree that *erōs* aims at *eudaimonia* (180b7, 188d8, 193d5, 194e6, 195a5) and that this has something to do with pursuing beauty (178d1–2, 196e4–5), and virtue (179d1–2, 184d7, 185b5, 188d4–9, 196d4–e6). The disagreements lie in their accounts of the nature of this virtue and happiness. In one account virtue is heroism on the battlefield, and related to, or identified with, honor (Phaedrus). In another, wisdom is somehow central to virtue (Pausanias). For Eryximachus, the virtues are those of the doctor or seer who can promote a harmonious order (188d). Aristophanic *erōs* aims at the *oikeion*, though he also highlights the virtues of the politician that result from that pursuit (192a7–8), and Agathon identifies virtue with poetic skill (196d5, e1). At numerous points it is suggested that *erōs*' beneficial effects are related to wisdom (182b7–c2, 184d1, 187c4–5, 184e1, 196d5–6), but this is variously construed as medical expertise and poetic skill (186c5, 196e1–2). The accounts leave it unclear why *erōs* should manifest itself in virtue and just what such virtue is supposed to be. Further disagreements are also to be found in the accounts of the aims thought to constitute *eudaimonia* (honor, the *oikeion* [poetic/medical] wisdom)? The “intertextual web” created by the speakers raises some of the difficulties and problems in need of resolution by the next speaker, in a way that is suggestive of a significant philosophical role. What needs to be clarified is whether, and how, these issues are, in fact, resolved in a philosophical account.

⁹ This is not to make the further claim that the speakers themselves should be understood to be suggesting these specific issues and questions.

2. Socrates' Critique

Although Socrates criticizes and responds to his predecessors, he does so in such a way that some have wondered whether his account fits into their intertextual web at all. For he claims that all the speakers (note the “you” plural):

attribute the greatest and most beautiful characteristics possible to the thing in question, whether they are true of it or not, and if they are false, well, that is of no importance. It seems that what was proposed was that each of us should appear to be offering an encomium to Eros, not that we should actually offer him one. It is for that reason, I imagine, that you rake up everything you can think of saying and attribute it to *erōs*.

Symposium 198d7–e6, trans. Rowe

Since Socrates says that he will speak differently from his predecessors (199b2–5), in a way that privileges the truth, we may be tempted to see a sharp break in the text between the “rhetorical and poetical [and] the dialectical” (Jowett; cf. Bury 1932, Dover 1980, and Rowe 1998a). If there is such a break, then does this imply that, from a philosophical perspective, the previous accounts are “fanciful performances,” with little to offer to our understanding of *erōs*? Since such a break might make it difficult to entertain the possibility that Socrates' speech is continuous with those of his peers, I need to examine this critique with care.

Socrates' central claim is that the speakers have not made the truth their priority (198e1–6). He does not say that the accounts are actually false, just that the question of their truth or falsity seems to be of no importance to the speakers. This leaves room for the possibility that they may have hit upon the truth, but if they did, it would have been a happy accident since they did not aim for this goal (198e2). But Socrates does imply that the speakers have no knowledge. They have been more concerned to appear to be offering an encomium to *erōs* than with actually offering one (e4). The speakers seem more concerned with “the probable,” rather than “the necessary,” as Socrates puts it later (200a9; cf. 201a8). This concern with appearances rather than truth motivates the attribution of all sorts of characteristics to *erōs*, without any clarity about whether and, if so, how these characteristics actually do apply to *erōs*.

There are some substantive views about knowledge and method behind this assessment. Socrates begins to clarify these when he turns to Agathon's account next. He approves (199c) Agathon's methodological rules (195a) and the distinction it implies (201e): one should first display the character *erōs*

has and then explain what it does. Socrates' approach shows that he believes that questions concerning the nature of the subject are prior to questions about its effects. As he makes more explicit elsewhere, it is only when one has correctly identified the nature of one's subject matter that one can go on to make inferences about the kind of benefits that such a character can bestow and how it can bestow them.¹⁰ Since the other speakers have not identified *erōs*' nature, they cannot know what it is about such a nature that leads to the virtue they praise as its proper outcome.¹¹ That is, perhaps, why we are offered such diverse views about the nature of *erōs* and its relationship to virtue. The speakers have not begun by identifying the nature of *erōs* first and so they have no firm basis on which to infer anything about its beneficial effects. When Phaedrus attempts to settle a dispute about the status of the lover and beloved he merely cites the conflicting accounts of Aeschylus and Homer (180–181; cf. 178b, 178c for further reliance on tradition and agreement). As Socrates makes plain elsewhere, the poets could be used in support of almost anything since there is no way of determining what they mean (*Protagoras* 347e). In order to have knowledge about *erōs* one must be able to identify the nature of the thing under discussion and go on to make inferences about this nature and effects on that basis.

So, to imply that Agathon and others do not have knowledge of *erōs* is to imply that they cannot provide a clear and consistent account about *erōs* because they do not have a viable definition of *erōs* on which to ground their views about its proper functioning, and from which to infer its benefits. But this is not to say (or imply) that they have no plausible beliefs about *erōs*. The previous speakers may believe many fine things about *erōs* (and some false ones), but they will not know either that these opinions are true, or why. To know why these things are true of *erōs*, one must have a definition of *erōs* which these statements involve. And to acquire this one must adopt a method designed to lead to that end. Nothing so far, then, rules out the possibility of continuity between a philosophical account and those with no concern for the truth. The previous speakers may be like “untrained soldiers in a battle, who rush about and often strike good blows, but without science.”¹²

¹⁰ This manner of investigating a subject is familiar Socratic procedure; see, for example, *Meno* 71a5–b7, *Republic* 354c1–3.

¹¹ We can imagine Socrates saying (as he does more explicitly elsewhere): “When I do not know what *erōs* is, I shall hardly know whether or not it happens to lead to benefits, or whether or not the one having it is happy” (cf. e.g. *Laches* 190b7–c2).

¹² Aristotle *Metaphysics* 1.4.985a.

3. Continuity and Resolution?

How, then, if at all, are the speeches used in the philosophical account? I want to begin by laying out some interpretative options to navigate us through the continuity I will outline shortly. Now it could be the case that any continuity between the speeches serves a rhetorical purpose in the dialogue. There could be artistic reasons that motivate the remarkably inclusive finale of the philosopher. Although I am concerned here with whether they play any significant philosophical role, any continuity between the speeches in itself need not be indicative of that. So let us entertain the possibility of a purely rhetorical view, option (1). It could also be the case that there are deeper epistemological convictions underlying any such continuity. Plato could be indicating in the construction of this dialogue that philosophical understanding emerges ultimately through a process of working through the *endoxa*. Let us call this the endoxic view, option (2). If the latter, then this could be taken in a weak or a strong sense. It could be the case that the speeches raise the right sorts of ideas and issues to be resolved for a proper explanatory account, and so they need to be attended to and worked through as part of philosophical progress. The speeches on this view could include useful falsehoods, that is views that are not true, but whose underlying puzzles prompt the inquiry in a relevant direction. But the salient point is that they are relevant and significant for a philosophical inquiry. Let us call this the weak dialectical reading (2 [a]). Rather more substantially, it may be the case that the speeches not only contain “nuggets of truth,” but as such they play a role in grounding the course and nature of the inquiry. Let us call this the strong dialectical reading (2 [b]). Consider, for example, the following from Aristotle on his procedure in ethics as a possible parallel for this category:

We must, as in all other cases, set the phenomena (*phainomena*) before us and, after first discussing the difficulties, go on to prove, if possible, the truth of all the reputable opinions about these affections or, failing this, of the greatest number and the most authoritative. For if we both resolve the difficulties and leave the reputable opinions (*endoxa*) undisturbed, we shall have proved the case sufficiently.

Nicomachean Ethics 7.1.1145b2–7, trans. Ross

And compare

About all these matters we must try to get conviction by arguments, using the phenomena as evidence and illustration. It would be

best that all men should clearly concur with what we are going to say, but if that is unattainable, then that all should in some way at least concur. And this if converted they will do, for every man has some contribution to make to the truth, and with this as a starting-point we must give some sort of proof about these matters. For by advancing from true but obscure judgements he will arrive at clear ones, always exchanging the usual confused statement for more real knowledge.

Eudemian Ethics 1.1.1216b26–35, trans. Solomon

There is some dispute about whether Aristotle's procedure is endoxic in a weak or strong sense and, if so, in just what works. The details of this dispute will not concern me here.¹³ The above passages from the ethical treatises certainly suggest a rather strong view. Reputable views or appearances ground the course of the inquiry: “with this as a starting-point we must give some sort of proof about these matters,” and “if we both resolve the difficulties and leave the reputable opinions (*endoxa*) undisturbed, we shall have proved the case sufficiently.” At any rate, we can use this to demarcate a third position, which gives the most substantive role to *endoxa*. On such a view, one aims to create as little disturbance for the *endoxa* as possible. Such views are seen to carry a certain evidential status, and it is as such that they are employed in a philosophical account.¹⁴ In the following I will offer a brief and rather dogmatic sketch of Socrates' speech with an eye on how the things said previously are employed in that account.

Socrates begins by subjecting Agathon to an elenchus (199c3), designed to scrutinize Agathon's proposed characterization of *erōs* as a beautiful god. Although this elenchus ends with Agathon's frank admission that he did not know any of the things which he said then, as he puts it (201b10), this should not be thought to introduce a sharp break between Socrates and his peers. For it is by clarifying certain views from Agathon's account—in particular, the precise nature of *erōs*' relationship to beauty—that Socrates locates an issue of crucial importance for the development of his own account, and aids the formulation of a viable definition of *erōs*.¹⁵ Agathon had claimed that

erōs' nature is beautiful and that *erōs* desires beauty (197b). On reflection, he is shown to believe that *erōs* lacks what it desires (200e1–5). These opinions are inconsistent. For if *erōs* desires beauty, and lacks what it desires, then *erōs* cannot possess beauty. Either *erōs* does not, in fact, desire beauty, or *erōs* lacks the beauty it desires. Both Agathon and Socrates preserve the view that *erōs* desires beauty, which leads to the preliminary conclusion that *erōs*' nature is such that it lacks the beauty it desires (202d1–3). Agathon did not propose a viable account of *erōs*' nature (as a beautiful god) on which to base his account of its beneficial effects. But this is not to say that Agathon's speech is nonsense. Socrates goes on to show that Agathon is right that *erōs* has some relationship both to beauty and to divinity; he is muddled about the precise nature of those relationships. This is a muddle to which Socrates himself, apparently, was subject, before he met the mysterious Diotima (201e3–7). Indeed, Socrates presents his own account as a repeat performance of this meeting because he used to say things similar to those said by Agathon. He goes on to show how his own account developed on the basis of things agreed between himself and Agathon, and, on that previous occasion, Diotima and the young Socrates (201d5).

Let us examine the details of this apparent continuity between Socrates' account and Agathon's. Socrates starts from the claim agreed to by Agathon that *erōs* lacks what it desires. He explains how his initial reaction to this was to assume that whatever is not good and beautiful must be the opposite (201e8–9, 202b1–2). On reflection, he came to realize (perhaps through similar elenctic scrutiny with Diotima) that there is a realm of intermediates between the opposites good and bad, beautiful and ugly (202a1–e1) and wisdom and ignorance (202a5–9). But he now has difficulty with the belief that Eros is a great god and that the gods possess all good things, such as wisdom (as Agathon and Phaedrus had held), and at the same time that Eros has an intermediate status in relation to these things. These opinions are inconsistent. Diotima/Socrates points out to Socrates/Agathon that he himself does not believe that Eros is a god (202c1–4) by which must be meant, as the following goes on to make plain, that this belief is at odds with other views he has agreed upon. Socrates comes to realize that, given that he has agreed that Eros lacks what he desires (202d1–3 which repeats Agathon's agreement at 201a–b), and that the gods possess good things (202c6–8), Eros cannot be a god (202d5), but a great spirit in between the two realms (202d13–e1). Herewith a definition of *erōs*. Now,

and Socrates' first speech in the *Phaedrus*: although Socrates' first speech is misguided, it is nonetheless methodologically sounder than that of Lysias.

¹³ On this issue see Irwin:1988 and the references in n1.

¹⁴ For the epistemological basis behind such a procedure, see Bolton:1990.

¹⁵ Agathon's speech may have been selected for such attention because his speech, at least, attempts to clarify the nature of the subject before making inferences about its beneficial effects. If one must begin an investigation with an identification of the subject matter, then examining Agathon's speech will be the best place to start. Agathon's speech is, in this respect, an improvement (199c). One might compare here the similar difference between Lysias' speech

after Socrates has answered both the *ti esti* and the *poios tis* questions central to a philosophical account, there is a clear back reference to Agathon's mistaken characterization of *erōs* as perfect and beautiful. In answer to the first we have the claim that Eros is an intermediate *daemon* (202e1); in answer to the second, that he is in between the needy and the resourceful (203b–204b). Agathon had, in fact, confused the lover with the beloved (204c which picks up on Agathon's encomium at 197b; cf. 180b3 where Phaedrus made a similar mistake). Since (as Stokes and Rowe have noted) the engagement with Agathon's speech (albeit in the guise of what Diotima said to Socrates) does not end until 204b–c when we are well into the positive section of Socrates' account, we can see a degree of continuity between Socrates' account and that of one of his peers, at least.¹⁶ Socrates preserves a grain of truth in Agathon's account: *erōs* does have some relationship both to beauty and to divinity, but these views required critical modification. There was some confusion about the nature of this relationship which led Agathon to believe that *erōs* was in possession of the things he strives towards. Clarifying the precise nature of *erōs*' relationship to beauty and divinity led to Socrates retaining some ideas and rejecting others as inconsistent with them, as we have seen. For example, he retains the idea that *erōs* desires beauty, and rejects the ideas that Eros is himself beautiful, and a god, both of which are inconsistent with the first—preserved—opinion. But although he rejects these specific notions, it seems reasonable to take it that Socrates spends so much time with Agathon's account because he also got things partially right: *erōs* does have some relationship to beauty and to divinity. It is for this reason that the speech can be used to clarify the precise nature of those relationships and lead well into the positive section of Socrates' account.

Only when a viable definition of *erōs* is reached does Socrates proceed to build up his account and move on to the aims and activity of *erōs*. Socrates considers what follows from this proposed definition: If *erōs*' nature is intermediate, then what use is *erōs* for human beings (204c6–7)? What does *erōs* aim to achieve in this deficient, yet resourceful, state (204d1–206a12)? Now, the needy nature of *erōs* was a central feature of Aristophanes' account. Because *erōs* had a needy nature Aristophanes inferred that *erōs* was after the pursuit of the whole: the *oikeion*. Although Socrates does not engage Aristophanes in an elenchus, he explicitly refers to this view and uses it to argue towards a clarification of the aim of *erōs* (205d10–206a1). The claim that *erōs* desires the *oikeion* is rejected when a further premise is introduced: that we are happy to relinquish diseased limbs (e3–5). If we are happy to relinquish diseased

limbs, it cannot be the *oikeion* as such that attracts. If we want only to possess *healthy* limbs (implicit), then there must be a connection between our desires and our good. Unless the *oikeion* and the *agathon* are the same, we will not aim to replenish a lack of the *oikeion* as such, but the good (206a1). For it is by the possession of good things that we are made happy, and we all want *that* (205a1–7). Aristophanes had given the wrong account of what it is that we are lacking, but since it is true that *erōs* desires what it lacks, and Socrates provides additional arguments for this claim, this seems to be a useful falsehood. Constructive dialectical work is being undertaken here, too, and notice that in this instance, we can see a view being modified on the basis of a further—and perhaps more basic—view also held by the speaker in question: that *erōs* has a connection to *eudaimonia* (193d5, cf. 180b7, 188d8, 194e6, 195a5 for the same view in the other accounts).

Socrates moves on from the aim of *erōs* to its activity. Phaedrus and Agathon had claimed that good things (e.g. the virtues) arise from the love of beautiful things (178d1–2, 196e4–5), but their accounts left the relationship between *erōs*' characteristic pursuit of beauty and this goal unclear. Socrates considers this next in the account. The desire for good things manifests itself in the pursuit of beauty (206b1), because it is in the pursuit of beauty that we can be productive of the good and beautiful things we value (206c1–2), as Agathon had held (197b8–9; cf. Phaedrus at 178d1–4). There is a nugget of truth here. And we now have an answer to why the pursuit of beauty is typically creative. Desiring agents are not in the abundant state Agathon envisaged; we are, in fact, needy creatures subject to flux and change who require productive work to attain anything at all. Unlike the divine, human beings cannot possess things in any straightforward way (207d5–208b5). Production is the mortal approximation to a state of divine possession (208b5). So *erōs* manifests itself in creativity as the distinctively mortal way in which we can possess good things. Agathon was right that creative activity is central to *erōs*, but wrong that this issues from a state of divine abundance.

Socrates then considers the kinds of creative activity that are, in fact, productive of the happiness that we desire. We pursue beauty because beauty arouses us to realize ourselves in certain ways and to make manifest whatever good we take to be central to our happiness (206c1–207a5). Phaedrus was right that some desiring agents, but not all, manifest this productive tendency in a love of honor (178c5; cf. 197a3–6 with 208c5–e3). These are the lovers of the lesser mysteries among whom are mentioned Admetus and Achilles and Patroclus (208d3), examples taken from Phaedrus' speech (179b5–7, e1–5). If the desired good end is honor (208c3), then desiring agents will pursue beau-

¹⁶ See, for example, Stokes 1986:130, 146 and Rowe 1998a:173.

tiful cities and souls in which they can realize themselves as honorable law-makers, poets, educators and craftsmen (209a1–e4), all activities cited in the previous accounts as expressions of *erōs* (182a7, 186d5, 197a–b).

The love of honor is a manifestation of *erōs* (Phaedrus was right about that), but it is not the only (or the best) one. Both the having of children and the procurement of a name for oneself by poetic production are unstable goods (*eidola*, 212a1–6) that will not satisfy the desire for the sort of good around which one's happiness can revolve. For the desire for *eudaimonia* is a desire for a stable and enduring good (206a12). But such productive activities depend on whether or not one's children turn out well, or one's books are well received; for only so can one secure honor for oneself. Virtue is, in fact, the real end of the desire for good things and happiness, this is not dependent on cults or shrines set up in one's honor (cf. 209d6–e4), but is a good of one's own soul, not dependent on any further event for its acquisition. The goods of the soul are desired for their own sake and not for the sake of a further end, just as the beautiful object that occasions such a good is chosen for its own sake (210e5–6). Again in this case Socrates preserves the view expressed by many speakers that *eudaimonia* is an end of *erōs* (180b7, 188d8, 193d5, 194e6, 195a5, 205a1), and virtue its proper outcome (179d1–2, 184d7, 185b5, 188d4–9, 196d4–e6). It is his account of the nature of these things that differs, and which grounds his arguments against the claim that honor is the privileged value.

According to Socrates to be able to produce genuine virtue is to know and love the cause of all beauty: true virtue is, in fact, knowledge of beauty (212a1–6). Pausanias had already suggested that there was a connection between virtue and wisdom (184d7–c1), and he was evidently right about that, though the slavish nature of his educational model suggested a misguided conception of this wisdom and virtue. If wisdom is required for virtue, then we need a method to achieve this end (viz. the ascent to the form), an expertise (*technē*) of the sort mentioned by Eryximachus as required for the proper expression of *erōs*. Pausanias' claim that *erōs* can only achieve virtue if it is focused on the soul and not the body (210c1–2) is also employed by Socrates. But the account of that *erōs* will, again, be different. The love of soul is important because it encourages one to turn to other bearers of beauty—those things that are responsible for the creation of beautiful souls—and so to continue searching into the nature of beauty (210c5–6). For if one is interested in the beauty of soul one will be interested in the kinds of things that are responsible for the creation of beautiful souls: laws, practices and knowledge. This expansive encounter with different kinds of beauty encourages reflection upon the nature of beauty in a wide variety of cases. And if one is to produce something

beautiful oneself (*kaloi logoi* about virtue, or true virtue itself), then one must understand the cause of all beauty in the world: the form of beauty.

So, if a relationship is to lead to the virtue previously praised, it must be one that leads to the form. In the contemplation of the form of beauty a desiring agent will no longer see an individual as the ultimate source of value—so that he is ready “to stop eating and drinking and just gaze at them and be with them” (211d5–e1), like Aristophanes' copulating lovers. But, as Aristophanes suggested, he will at last find a *paidika* in accordance with his *nous* (cf. 193c7–8): the form. This union issues in the creativity praised by Agathon (196d7–e2 with 212a4), and this time not for the sake of fame, as Phaedrus and Agathon claimed (197a3–6), but for its own sake. If what we want is a good whose possession delivers *eudaimonia* (205a1–3 with 180b7, 188d8, 193d5, 194e6, 195a5, 205a1), this is found, above all, in the life of contemplation—of the beautiful (211d1–3 with 212a1–5). This is the best human life (211d1–3), and a god-like life, which issues in friendship between gods and men, as Eryximachus had rightly claimed (188c1–d1 with 212a6).

This brief survey of Socrates' speech should suffice to show that there is a great deal of continuity between the philosophical account and the previous speeches. We have seen many cases where things said by the previous speakers are taken up as they stand. Consider, for example, the following claims: that *erōs* desires what it lacks (191a5–6); that *erōs* is of beauty (197b8); that *erōs* for the soul is more valuable than *erōs* for the body (184a1); that good things arise from the love of beautiful things (197b8–9); that *erōs* aims at virtue (178c5–6, 179a8, 180b7–8, 188d5–6, 178c5–6, 179a8, d1–2, 180b7–8, 184d7, 185b5, 188d4–9, 196d4–e6), the good (188d5) and happiness (180b7, 188d8, 193d5, 194e6, 195a5); that *erōs* must be governed by knowledge (188d1–2; cf. 184d1–e1); that it has some intimate relationship to *phronēsis* (182b7–c2, 184d1) *epistēmē* (187c4–5) *sophia* (196d5–6), and that *erōs* brings together the human and the divine (188d8–9). The inclusion of such views in an account that professes to “speak the truth” suggests that these are indeed “nuggets of truth.”

As we have seen, the speakers have differing conceptions of what constitutes *eudaimonia*, or wisdom, for example. It is partly because of such differing, and often inconsistent, accounts of virtue, or *erōs*' relationship to beauty and wisdom, that many things said previously appear in a substantially modified form. For example, Phaedrus was right that *erōs* aims at virtue, though wrong that the pursuit of honor is the only, or best, way to achieve it. Pausanias was right that there is an intimate relationship between wisdom and virtue, though wrong about the slavish transmission of wisdom and virtue. Eryximachus, though right that expertise is essential to the proper activity of *erōs*, mistak-

only identified this with the medical art, and music, prophecy and astronomy. Aristophanes was right that *erōs* pursues what it lacks, but wrong that this is the *oikeion*. And Agathon was right that *erōs* has an intimate relationship to beauty, though wrong about the details of this relationship.

Although it seems to be the case that much said previously is employed in some shape or form, one can also find cases where a specific view is disregarded, and cases where there is no attempt to preserve a grain of truth in the view in question. For example, Eryximachus' claim that the medical art best characterizes erotic expertise is neither employed nor refuted, but it is in tension with Socrates' argument that philosophy is the best expression of *erōs*; it is philosophy that establishes the relationship between the human and the divine that Eryximachus praised (212a1–6 with 188d8–9). But rather more charitably perhaps, such a case could be seen as one which is modified (wrong identification of expertise), though preserved (expertise of a certain kind is central). Such nuances of classification will depend ultimately on how charitable one wants to be. But the above should be sufficient to show that many of the speakers' most central views are either subjected to critical re-figuration on the basis of further arguments, or otherwise employed in some shape or form. There is no sharp separation between the things said by the previous speakers—what they say about *erōs* in a muddled or incomplete form—and Socrates' account. Furthermore, many of the puzzles and inconsistencies are clarified by Socrates' account and put on a more plausible rational foundation.

One might raise the following objection, however. Since the speakers have such different conceptions of what is *kalon*, or the nature of virtue and wisdom, for example, to what extent can one claim that it is the same *belief* employed in the philosophical account? If one cannot establish this claim then, does that not undermine the further claim that there is continuity between the accounts?¹⁷ One might say that it is the same belief employed by philosophers and non-philosophers (e.g. the *erōs* has a relationship to wisdom and virtue), but the accounts also exhibit different related beliefs (e.g. about what constitutes wisdom and virtue). Or, one might say that the speakers hold different original beliefs because of their different related beliefs (e.g. about what constitutes wisdom). On this latter view the related beliefs make the original beliefs mean something so different that it no longer makes sense to consider the original beliefs to be the same beliefs at all. There are clearly important issues underlying such an objection. There is some evidence to suggest that Plato considered the important thing to be what the speakers

are referring to by the words they use and not what is in the heads of individual speakers, or even what is determined by the meaning of their words (e.g. from the *Cratylus*). If so, then we can indeed consider the speakers to be referring, albeit dimly, to the same thing, though they hold widely divergent views about it. And insofar as they are still beliefs about the same thing, then there is continuity between the accounts in this work.¹⁸

There is a further point of clarification required at this stage. Any continuity between Socrates and his peers is dramatically signposted as fictional. Socrates (rather uncharacteristically) is presented as an expert on erotic matters, who visited Diotima *before* this symposium. If so, then this undermines the potential philosophical significance of any apparent continuity outright. Let me make it clear that I am concerned here with Plato's composition of the dialogue and why he constructs such continuity between the accounts. Socrates' visit to Diotima, and his apparent expertise on erotic matters, does nothing to undermine that fact, though it may be relevant to an interpretation of how such continuity is to be explained, as we shall see.¹⁹

4. Endoxic Method?

I hope to have shown so far that the previous speeches provide more than just a survey of current views on the topic of *erōs*. Their ample use in Socrates' speech—one that aims for the truth—indicates that they raise the right sorts of issues and puzzles that an explanatory account needs to address. So much continuity and resolution, in fact, emerges with the philosophical account that it is very tempting to compare this account with Aristotle. And note that, as many have argued, the speeches are reflective of broad intellectual undercurrents operative in Plato's contemporary culture. In other Platonic dialogues some of those present are linked to famous wise men. Phaedrus is linked to Hippias in the *Protagoras* (315c) and to Lysias in the *Phaedrus* (228a). Pausanias is linked to Prodicus in the *Protagoras* (315d). Eryximachus' speech relates him to Hippocrates, Aristophanes needs no introduction and Agathon is linked to Gorgias (*Symposium* 198c). Such links suggest that the things said by the previous speakers are not just things that struck Plato as possibly plausible things to say about *erōs*, but are views that are related, albeit roughly, to views

¹⁷ I thank Christopher Rowe for this objection.

¹⁸ Agathon and Socrates must also mean something similar when they discuss *erōs* and the *kalon*, for example, otherwise how would any discussion get off the ground at all, let alone make the progress that we see in the elenctic encounter between these two? I thank C. D. C. Reeve for helpful discussion of this issue.

¹⁹ I thank David Sedley for discussion of this issue.

current at the time, in much the same way as Socrates' speech is related to the sorts of Platonic concerns that occur time and again in the dialogues. This is important to bear in mind if we are to entertain an endoxic reading of an Aristotelian sort, and return to the interpretative options above.²⁰

We are familiar with Aristotle's procedure of laying out the views of his predecessors, and showing where the agreements and disagreements lie before going on to offer the beacon of philosophical resolution. And in this dialogue the presentation of the speeches seems to do just that: it sets out the appearances, shows where the puzzles are, and prepares the ground for the philosophical account to work through. Further, Socrates' account employs many of the previous views in some shape or form, and seems to preserve some of the most basic things said from the previous accounts. It might appear then that each speaker "has some contribution to make to the truth" (see *Eudemian Ethics* as cited above). Now, this raises the question of just how significant and substantive a role we are to ascribe to the previous views in the development of a philosophical understanding. If we return to the interpretative options above, are we to conclude that the speeches contribute philosophically (option 2) in a weak (a), or a strong (b), dialectical sense? If we are to consider the latter option then we need some evidence that the *endoxa* have more than pragmatic utility in directing the mind towards possibly promising theories. We need to entertain the idea that they have a role to play in the discovery of philosophical truth, and in the justification of the results of philosophical inquiry. The *endoxa* might perform this role if they are seen to be endowed with a certain evidential status and thereby seen to be authoritative.²¹ In order to clarify whether the *legomena* in the *Symposium* have the status of Aristotelian *endoxa*, then, we need evidence that Plato is trying to preserve the truth of the greatest number, or at least "the most authoritative" because proceeding in this way will be a mark of truth. Do the agreements among the speakers carry any philosophical weight? Are there any indications that at least some of the previous views, at least—those preserved in the philosophical account—are seen to be authoritative?

There are considerations that do not sit comfortably with supposing that the previous views, or some sub-set of them, have such status. For Aristotle, ethics is something we are all supposed to know something about in some

way; ethical knowledge reflects the accumulative wisdom of generations of intelligent people. This does not sound very Platonic, at least if we suppose that Plato (at the time of writing the *Symposium*) held similar views to those expressed in the *Republic*. For there ethical knowledge is an axiomatized deductive system grounded in knowledge of the form of the Good. It is not clear whether we should bring such considerations to bear on the *Symposium*. But there is little evidence internal to the text that the speeches are taken up because they are reputable and seen to be authoritative. There is no explicit statement, for example, to the effect that a good theory of *erōs* must respect and preserve ordinary, or reputable, views about *erōs*. Nor is Socrates' account littered with "we all believe that p" statements that serve as authoritative grounds for his arguments.

The most suggestive piece of evidence for the stronger reading emerges from consideration of the elenchus of Agathon. The philosophical account is advertised as one that "aims for the truth" (199b1), and yet it would appear that the account is presented as developing dialectically, in part, by means of engagement with the views of Agathon, as we have seen. Recall that it is by clarifying the precise nature of Agathon's beliefs about *erōs* and beauty and their relationship to other beliefs (e.g. that *erōs* lacks what it desires) that Socrates seems to generate the central premises on which his own account relies.²² If it is the case that the proposed definition of *erōs* as an intermediary being is deduced from views expressed and clarified from previous accounts, then this is puzzling. In reaching this idea one does not know why certain views are retained and others rejected as inconsistent with them. Are these views widely accepted? Or are they the results of repeated *elenchi*?²³ Two views, in particular, play a crucial role here: that *erōs* desires beauty (from Agathon's speech), and that it lacks the thing it desires (from Aristophanes' speech and endorsed by Agathon on reflection). It may be the case that all Socrates needs for an *ad hominem* examination of Agathon are beliefs held by Agathon, but the nature of *erōs* is clarified in his own account on the basis of things agreed

²⁰ I thank Zena Hitz for pressing me on this point.

²¹ Cf. Barnes 1981:495 on Aristotle: Aristotle "announces time and again that the way to truth is through the study of reputable opinions [i.e. through dialectic]." Cf. Burnyeat 1986, though compare Irwin 1988 for a more cautious view. I thank Ben Morison and Hendrik Lorenz for useful discussion of this issue.

²² Cf. Stokes 1986:146: "In the talks as recorded Socrates takes over the part of Agathon and Diotima that of Socrates. The Socrates of the story has accepted exactly the same propositions (201e) as the Agathon of the *Symposium*; and Diotima, although she has naturally not heard Agathon's encomium and the ensuing discussion, bases her arguments on Agathon's admissions and implications, or occasionally corrects them." He argues further that "every question Socrates has asked has been explanatory of Agathon's original encomium. In each question Socrates either extracts from Agathon a relatively clear inference or he asks for a resolution of a difficulty or ambiguity"; see Stokes 1986:130; cf. 114.

²³ The elenchus of Agathon is presented as a repeat performance of *elenchi* which took place between Socrates and Diotima on numerous occasions (201c3–7; 206b5–6; 207a5–6).

between himself and Agathon, as he says explicitly (201d6), and as back reference to Agathon's speech after the *ti esti/poios tis* questions are answered indicates. What justifies the presentation of that account as aiming at the truth if it is a continuation of views which have been critically re-figured and clarified from at least one previous account (199a7)? We are given plenty of evidence to show that the accounts present conflicting views. Why suppose that one has the right starting points if one proceeds in this way? It does not seem plausible to suppose that Socrates is not committed to the truth of the account of *erōs*, but is simply exploring the view of his peers. Although nothing in my account commits me to the claim that Socrates' speech is a full exposition of the truth, it is clearly presented as one that aims for the truth (199b1).

It seems reasonable to think that the clarification of the two conflicting beliefs that *erōs* desires beauty, and that it lacks what it desires, are ones which are not only most commonly held, but also ones which elenctic experience has proven to be most viable. The former is taken to be axiomatic by most speakers, though the latter is only explicit in Aristophanes' account and resurfaces in the elenchus of Agathon.²⁴ When the latter claim resurfaces it is given further argumentative support and put on a better rational foundation. The present is necessary, and so everyone who desires must desire something not yet available to him (200a10–e10). If so, then it is not the case that these beliefs are adopted simply on the grounds that they are common views. But it may be the case that beliefs are tested in relation to what is most commonly held (e.g. that *erōs* desires beauty, and *eudaimonia*),²⁵ and that these beliefs are also ones

which elenctic experience has repeatedly shown to be viable ones, perhaps because asserting their contrary leads to absurdity.²⁶ But even so, why suppose that this will deliver a truthful, rather than just a consistent, account? One thing that might ground such confidence is precisely if such views did have some status and authority, as the strong dialectical reading above would have it.

An argument in favor of an endoxic reading of this strength would need support of the sort that is not readily available in this text. For Aristotle, for example, his confidence in our capacity to know the world and its capacity to reveal itself in the *phainomena* provide much of the driving force behind his method.²⁷ As Bolton has argued, "it is not because certain beliefs are widely accepted by us that the belief in question is justified by reference to them. Rather it is because those beliefs bear a special relation to the data of experience" (Bolton 1990:235–236). And herewith the nub of the difference between such views and Plato. For the Socrates of the *Symposium* knowledge is of separately existing forms, and these are not to be grasped in the appearances of the world. Since the privileged "special relation" between one's cognitive states and the world is not that between our views about things and the readily accessible appearances, but that between the mind and the forms, no philosophical theory is going to be justified with reference to such views. That is not to say that the world of non-philosophers is cognitively sterile, however. The sensible world is an imperfect reflection of the real nature of things and, as a *reflection*, is continuous with the real nature of things. The problem with the sensible world is often presented as a very specific one: appearances present things as "confounded" (*Republic* 524c), that is, they ascribe opposite properties to the same object thus making it difficult to consider the real nature of the thing. Grounding one's beliefs in such objects leads to a corresponding compresence of opposites in one's beliefs, which is a problem if knowledge entails truth.²⁸

²⁴ One reason why Agathon and Aristophanes may have been picked out for special attention in this section of his account is that their speeches discuss the nature of *erōs* and are therefore of special relevance to a definition of *erōs*. If one is committed to the centrality of definitional questions, then one will focus on those accounts most relevant to that. Recall that Aristophanes focused on the needy nature of *erōs*. He emphasized its distinctively human character and expressed concern that *erōs* stay in its proper (mortal) place and avoid a hubristic ascent to the divine (190c8). Agathon, by contrast, claimed that Eros was a great god and lovers in a divine state of abundance (195a5, 197a1). Socrates' account explains that the real nature of *erōs* is in between a state of lack and possession, the mortal and the divine. This is also relevant to the conversation with Agathon and Aristophanes about comedy and tragedy at the end of the dialogue (223d2–5). Since *erōs* has such a nature, one who understands it must know that it is not just a deficient state fitting for Aristophanic portrayal, not just an abundant state of communion with the divine, fitting for a tragedian to portray. The nature of *erōs* is a needy, yet productive, aspiration to the divine and best captured by a combination of the low and the high, the mortal and the divine, the comic and the tragic. And if that is the case, then we can see why Aristophanes and Agathon are particularly relevant here, too.

²⁵ We can see an example of this in the rejection of Aristophanes' claim that *erōs* pursues the *oikeion*. This claim is rejected when two further premises are introduced: that we are happy to relinquish diseased limbs, and that we all desire *eudaimonia* (205d10–206a1).

²⁶ On one occasion when Socrates was "using the very arguments" he was using with Agathon, he asserted that *erōs* was neither beautiful nor good, a claim which was rejected since it led to absurdity (201e10).

²⁷ See *Eudemian Ethics* 1.1.1216b26–35, *Rhetoric* 1.1.1355a14–18, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.8.1098b27–29. In certain places a connection is established between what is most deeply held and what is based on experience, or perceptual data (cf. *Topics* 6.4.142a2; *Physics* 1.1.184a16–26; *De Insomniis* 462b14–16). This relationship between what is most *endoxon* and experience provides a further reason for confidence on Aristotle's part. On this issue, see Bolton 1990:235–236. This accounts for the fact that when perceptual data are in conflict with the *endoxa* they have priority (cf. *De Caelo* 3.4.303a20–23 with 3.7.306a3–17 and *Generation of Animals* 3.10.760b27–33), and account for those passages where Aristotle stresses his desire to accommodate both *phainomena* and *endoxa* in scientific inquiry (*De Caelo* 3.4.303a20–23 and *Physics* 4.4.211a7–11).

²⁸ On this issue, see Fine 2003b.

For some of these may be true, and some false, and that is why, as the argument against the Sight-lovers in *Republic V* tried to show, knowledge of the real natures of things cannot be grounded in the appearances, or ultimately justified with reference to beliefs about them.

But perhaps the strongest reason against the strong dialectical reading is the following. Socrates' critique of his peers (considered above) was an explicit statement to the effect that the previous speeches did not aim for truth (*Symposium* 198d7–e6). This suggests that any nuggets of truth found therein cannot be preserved because they are considered to carry a certain evidential status, or authority. They may happen to be true, but this is just a happy accident. So, even if Socrates, or rather, Plato, happens to agree with such views, there is little sense (and evidence to the contrary) that he does so because the speakers said such a thing. This perhaps explains why there are independent arguments provided for many of the claims that are preserved (e.g. for Aristophanes' claim that *erōs* desires what it lacks: 200a1–e10, or Agathon's claim that *erōs* issues in creativity: 207c5–208b5). It also explains why Socrates' account also employs views we do not see emerging dialectically, e.g. ones involving a conception of human nature and its potentialities (206b1), and the nature of knowledge (211–212). The account as a whole remains dialectical in the sense that Socrates explains some of their most central beliefs about *erōs* by showing how they can be understood in light of a certain conception of human nature, and knowledge and so on, but it is not ultimately accountable to them. There is little to suggest that the previous views provide “some proof” of the veracity of the account.²⁹

But we need not opt for the strong reading in order to see the philosophical value in the previous accounts. So far I have argued the following. The speeches are more than just a sequence of equally arbitrary claims that provide a rough and ready survey of how people discuss the topic at hand. The central claims of each speech are reasonable, and the disputes worth solving. The evidence for this is that many of the ideas are, in fact, taken up, and the disputes resolved, in the account of the philosopher. After all, as Apollodorus

²⁹ Further, at the end of his speech Socrates claims that the account is a matter of which he is persuaded, not something he knows to be true (212a6–7). Since the account of the ascent to the form of beauty indicates that more is required for knowledge proper, we might suppose that the account is not yet grounded at all. Although there are no indications of a form of *erōs*, it could be the case that an account of *erōs* needs to be grounded in an account of the *kalon*, towards which it is essentially related. Once we know the nature of the relevant form, then this will provide the proper grounds of an account of *erōs*. Such knowledge will not be attained by dialectical work of the sort that drives Socrates' inquiry alone, though it may still contribute to the emergence of such knowledge.

said at the start of the dialogue, the speeches at Agathon's banquet that were preserved were those “worthy of mention” (178a4). The speeches are worthy of inclusion in the dialogue, not because they justify the results of the inquiry (the strong dialectical reading), but because they are a useful tool towards those results (the weak dialectical reading). The detailed speeches provide the opportunity to examine a variety of puzzles and issues arising from the topic, and this enables one to discern more clearly where the resolutions might lie. The speeches lay out the issues that a philosophical account needs to, and does in fact, explain.

One might still like to know what grounds Plato's confidence in even this. What ensures that the direction in which the speeches take us is a relevant one? What guarantees that a consideration of such mixed views can play a useful role in an inquiry that aims towards the truth? In the *Symposium*, as in the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*, Plato seems to assume that one will end up with the right starting points for further inquiry because there is something about the nature of the mind that ensures such progress is possible. All human beings are pregnant with wisdom and virtue, albeit to varying degrees, and when we reach a certain age we naturally desire to express this in actions and productions of various kinds (206c1–3, 209a3). Human beings, we might say, are naturally knowers (albeit to varying degrees, 209a3), and this ability naturally develops as we mature as human beings (206c3–4).³⁰ If we engage in proper reflection on the *endoxa* then we are such as to be able to favor truth over falsehoods, as one scholar has put it, and so to make progress towards the truth.³¹

Whatever the ultimate grounds of such an account turn out to be, we can nonetheless conclude that Plato finds value in the things said by non-philosophers, and some *philosophical* value in particular. It could also be the case, of course, that including the previous views in the philosophical account serves a pedagogical, or rhetorical function. Such a procedure not only aids clarity, but also advertises the superior value of philosophy by appropriating and perfecting the insights of others. But I have argued that there is a deeper epistemological conviction at work here. Philosophical understanding emerges

³⁰ There is, of course, variation in the degree to which human beings develop over time, as the contrast between the desiring agents of the lower and higher mysteries of his speech indicates (212a1–6 with 209a3). This variation in epistemic performance will depend in part on external factors, like having the proper method (of the ascent). But insofar as our souls are pregnant with wisdom and virtue we are perhaps to suppose that we are fitted by nature to reach this specific end and are naturally inclined towards the truth. If so, then perhaps this is the optimistic assumption behind the more constructive slant of the Socrates of the *Symposium*. I argue this point more fully in Sheffield 2001a.

³¹ E.g. Fine 2003b commenting on the *Meno*.

from a process of working through the *endoxa*. Unlike Aristotle, Plato presents these in detailed accounts delivered by richly developed characters. This surely serves to remind us of the sorts of lives that were constructed as a result of adopting the beliefs and values espoused by the individual speakers.³² However they are presented, the accounts of Socrates' peers will be for the sake of our philosophical education, in much the same way as the lower mysteries were taught to Socrates for the sake of his grasp of the higher (210a6–7). In fact, the striking parallels between the desiring agents of the lower mysteries and the symposiasts strongly support such a reading.³³ We can nonetheless conclude, then, that Plato does find value in the things said by non-philosophers. The shared wreath of wisdom given by Alcibiades to Socrates and the symposiasts' greatest representative (i.e. Agathon) is richly deserved (213e1–5). And this, after all, reflects not only the epistemic value of dialectic as a shared enterprise, but also the value of the symposium as a place in which the truth may be sought as part of a communal enterprise—and when properly conducted—discovered.³⁴

³² On this issue see further O'Connor forthcoming, Nehamas 1998, and Sheffield 2006.

³³ Such types included lawmakers, poets and craftsmen (209a5), many of which were celebrated by the symposiasts in their speeches. They value the life of the soul over the body (209c with 176e4–10) and were characterized by a love of honor (208c3 with 198d7–e6). Further, the desiring agents of the lower mysteries were, after all, meant to be familiar to Socrates in his role play with Diotima (209e5); in other words, they are supposed to be familiar to Agathon and his peers as types of character they would recognize. For further arguments for this claim, see Sheffield 2006.

³⁴ On this role for symposia generally, see Rösler 1995.

Three

A Platonic Reading of Plato's *Symposium*

Lloyd P. Gerson

1.

THE AMERICAN POET AND CRITIC John Jay Chapman (1862–1933) wrote, ... to the historical student, to the man who not only knows something of books, but something of the world, the *Symposium* of Plato is seen to have been in every age since Plato the most effective plea for evil that one can point to or recall. The moral disease which it inculcates is apt to break out in any age and to poison the young. The *Symposium* has always been the *vade mecum* of those who accept and continue the practice which it celebrates. To them it is a sort of lurid devotional book—the sulphurous breviary of the pederast.

This is not a view of the dialogue to which scholars today generally subscribe.¹ Why not? What precisely are the grounds on which we can confidently or even reasonably eliminate any particular interpretation of a Platonic dialogue? Some would say, indeed, that there are no grounds for eliminating any interpretation. Let a thousand flowers bloom. If “interpretation” here means, roughly, “what the dialogue has inspired me to think” or “what I learned from the dialogue,” then it is difficult to argue with this approach. Most, though, would use “interpretation” more narrowly, based on some sort of criteria for interpretation. This is where things get interesting. Because now we can ask the question, “what sort of criteria and assumptions must we bring to our reading of the dialogue?” I say “must” and not “can” because I am myself assuming that these criteria and assumptions are supposed to be the right ones, or at least criteria and assumptions which are such that, at the end of

¹ Though it is an interpretation implicit in the culture that, say, produced *Brideshead Revisited*.

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PLATO'S *SYMPOSIUM*
ISSUES IN INTERPRETATION AND RECEPTION

Edited by
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TRUSTEES FOR HARVARD UNIVERSITY
WASHINGTON, DC
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2006