

**Transgressing Boundaries: A Discussion Concerning
Methodology, Ἔρως, and Politics in *Symposium* and Platonic
Philosophy**

by

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Abstract

This thesis does three things in three distinct sections. First, this thesis is a discussion and critique of method. I attempt to address pivotal issues that permeate throughout the Platonic scholarship, problems of method and the problem of authorial intent. Following discussion of the methodological problems that hinder the Platonic scholarship, I propose an overlooked methodological model and psychology that is skeptical, flexible, and pragmatic: eclecticism. Second, I apply the method and demonstrate its strength while investigating the concept of ἔρως (eros) in the first six speeches in Plato's *Symposium*. Third, I discuss my findings. From my exegesis, I engage in phenomenology of eros and reflect on its metaphysical underpinnings. I argue that eros is by nature fundamentally self-negating and thus absurd. I then discuss the importance of renewed and further reflection on the nature of eros and its role as an engine for philosophy and political life.

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χρυσὸν οἱ διζήμενοι γῆν πολλὴν ὀρύσσουσι καὶ εὕρισκουσιν ὀλίγου.

Ἡράκλειτος

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Chapter 1: Methodology

1.1 Introduction

This thesis has three distinct sections where I do three distinct things. The first section is a discussion and critique of method. Generally, the first section considers the difficulties that face methods and approaches to Plato's dialogues and his philosophy. In turn, I propose a method of my own. In terms of specifics, in the first section I attempt to articulate and address a pivotal issue that permeates throughout the Platonic scholarship. This problem is the problem of authorial intent. To be candid, nobody can prove beyond a reasonable doubt¹ that they know Plato's personal thoughts on the basis of what he wrote, especially concerning politics and human life, whether in relation to, or independent of, his alleged metaphysics. To address this problem of authorial intent, I propose reflection and reconsideration on method and philosophic outlooks when approaching the work of Plato, on the one hand, and a reevaluation of our scholarly goals when approaching the dialogues, on the other hand. Primarily, I focus on the distinction between hermeneutics, exegesis, and eisegesis, defending good hermeneutics and exegesis. In light of the methodological problems that hinder the Platonic scholarship, I propose an exegetical model and psychology that is both rigorous and pragmatic, eclectic. The aim of this method is to approach the Platonic dialogues philosophically while remaining undogmatic, open to insightful discussion, and avoiding unsupportable claims—I propose a way of thinking, reading, and speaking about Plato and his ideas.

In the second section, I apply my method. I demonstrate its strengths while approaching what I consider Plato's most beautiful dialogue, *Symposium*. What I control for while applying my method, or rather, to what I concentrate my focus while exploring the richness of *Symposium*, is the concept of ἔρως (eros) in the first six speeches of the dialogue. I limit myself to the first six speeches for a chief reason; there *seems* to be (and I say this in hindsight) a distinct ascent in sublimity of the subject matter from speech to speech, the conversation beginning with the youthful musings of Phaedrus and gradually climbing to a philosophic culmination in the captivating secrets of Diotima. On the one hand, I choose to begin with Phaedrus and finish with Diotima because the discussion is neatly contained, her speech fitting as the philosophic apex of the dialogue. On the other hand, if I were to include Alcibiades' confession, one might argue that

¹ Reasonable doubt is not merely possible doubt.

there is an obligation to investigate all that entails the *decline* from the Socrates-Diotima speech. Ergo, this might entail an inquiry into eros in full, i.e. its contraries, which mean branching out to the dialogues *Alcibiades I, II, Republic, Philebus, Phaedrus, Lysis*, and so on to grasp a comprehensive view of eros. Such is beyond the scope of this project.

In the third section, I discuss my findings. From the exegesis of these six encomiums, I engage in phenomenology (a rational account of the phenomenon) of eros and reflect on its metaphysical underpinnings. I deduce that eros is by nature fundamentally self-negating and thus absurd. From this conclusion, I then discuss the importance of renewed and further reflection on the nature of eros and its role as an engine for philosophy and political life, emphasizing the complexity of the human ψυχή and man as ὁ ψυχῆτιος ὁ ὄν. Finally, I frame my analysis, and Plato's *Symposium*, as by no means the final words on eros. There is ample room for fertile discussion.

1.2 A Problem

Those of us who read and continue to read Plato's dialogues know that his philosophy possesses a seductive charm. Much of this allure comes from the immersion the dialogues themselves create: Every time we, like Machiavelli, strip ourselves of our "muddy, sweaty workday clothes and put on the robes" of philosophy, entering the domain of Plato's dialogues, be it *Symposium*, *Apology*, or *Euthydemus*, some new question or thought catches our mind's eye.² Plato's philosophy raises questions, in the drama of the dialogues themselves, but also within us, his readers. So too do Plato's readers bring a variety of questions to the text, this reciprocity suggesting a sort of playful exchange between the Greek philosopher and his audience, a conversation. Plato raises questions of epistemology, ontology, or questions about how we ought to live and what we ought to love, the human things, and he provides speculative answers through the voice of Socrates, his companions, and interlocutors. We, too, bring the very same kind of questions to the works of Plato. In part due to the nature of humanity as a common modality, in part due to Plato's own genius, the interplay between author and audience in Plato's dialogues exists with such a degree of seamlessness that they feel as though they might have been written yesterday. Every age can find meaning in Plato's writing and relate to his dialogues

² Niccolo Machiavelli, Letter to Francesco Vettori. See John R. Hale, ed., *The Literary Works of Machiavelli*, (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 1961), 139.

because something about human experience and the world remains continuous. This is a perennial beauty of philosophy.

Now, let us turn from the philosopher to his audience and get down to brass tacks. Within the context of the Great Conversation, many who study Plato reply to the philosopher and to one another. Our replies, insights, questions, and discussions compose a vast sea of commentary and literature which we might call 'Platonic Studies.' Within this Platonic literature, however, one type of question seems to pervade all Platonic scholarship, haunting the scholarship sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly. The question that pervades nearly all of Platonic scholarship is the question of authorial intent, a question that highlights an asymmetrical element of the relationship between Plato and his audience. To be candid, when we read Plato's letters and dialogues, when we think and write about Plato, in the backdrop of our mind is a question that scopes a dizzying variety of subjects from an amazing variety of angles, partly due to the immense genius of the author: "What is Plato trying to say, what is he trying to tell us?"

Allow me to illustrate my point. I have acquainted myself with but a humble sample of the ideas of numerous thinkers who have dabbled in or seriously dedicated their lives to Platonic studies, many of which are students of differing schools of thought. For some examples of the latter sort, I have sampled the work of Leo Strauss, Stanley Rosen, Alan Bloom, Gregory Vlastos, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jacob Klein, John M. Cooper, C. J. Rowe, and so on. All these thinkers have the question of authorial intent in mind to greater or lesser degrees, either consciously or subconsciously when they approach Plato. My evidence for this truth is made easily available. All these thinkers comment on Plato's writings, and each proposes some interpretation of Plato's ideas.

Where does this question of authorial intent take us? Though exposed to a variety of beautiful ideas, and fascinating observations and interpretations of Plato's philosophy, my experience with the academic discussion, albeit limited, suggests that there is no universal agreement about Plato's thought. That is to say, there is no universal agreement about Plato's convictions concerning public and private life, and there is no universal agreement about Plato's philosophy *qua* philosophical doctrine. Now, many will agree that there are philosophical innovations which are quintessentially original to Plato, such as the theory of Ideas, the virtue-craft analogy, or the Indefinite Dyad and its relationship to the One, yet these in agreement may

debate what the innovations are and mean. Moreover, whether there are Platonic *doctrines* or *dogmas* in the modern sense, what constitutes the Platonic doctrines or dogmas *if they do indeed exist*, and whether or not Plato himself prescribes to these doctrines such as the theory of Ideas, and what Plato thinks about private and public life—these all remain within the domain of speculation, especially the latter. Because these things remain in the domain of speculation, they are up for debate. And we can see that these things are up for debate at least insofar as there happens to be widespread debate about Plato's views about such things. One need only look into the literature. And, because there *is* widespread debate, there is clearly no universal agreement, and because there is no universal agreement, the debates about Plato's philosophy, the dialogues, continue.

Why might this be the case? Why is there such a lack of agreement concerning Plato's philosophy, and why do I say that so much of Platonic philosophy remains in the domain of speculation? Flatly, Plato chose to present his ideas in an open ended and oblique way through an open ended and oblique medium, the dialogue. As those of us who have spent any time with the dialogues know, it is often unclear what beautified Socrates, his companions, and their puppeteer, Plato, are trying to convey. This ambiguity, subsequently, creates a problem for interpretation. How do we clarify the ambiguous? We can see why, in a general sense, there remains so much debate about Plato's philosophy despite the fact we have been studying it for over 2000 years. There is no universal agreement about Plato's authorial intent because his authorial intent is *not* clear, and vice versa.

To illustrate my point, let me recall but a few of the 'Platos' to which the scholarship has exposed me. I will do this without 'pointing fingers,' because, on the one hand, my characterization of these 'Platos' is self-admittedly 'artless,' while on the other hand, for many, to have such an artless characterization of Plato attributed to one's own respective conception is insult. But to my point. There is a reading of Plato as a mathematical mystic, probably (for some, 'definitely') influenced by Orphism, Pythagoreanism, the hero cults, and possibly (and for some, 'most probably') influenced by nomadic shamanism, Egyptian occultism, and Eastern philosophy. There is a reading of Plato as an idealist, a staunch hyper-rationalist who cares for thought alone, whose views are best expressed in *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Meno*, *Republic*, and Socrates' deathbed arguments in *Phaedo*. Others read Plato as a politic thinker and

writer coupled in the same vein as Xenophon and Machiavelli, Plato as a sort of crypto-philosophic hedonist sympathetic to the Greek sophists. There are readings of Plato where he believes his metaphysics, and readings where he does not believe his metaphysics. There are readings of Plato as a systematic thinker, and reading of Plato as an unsystematic thinker. There are readings of Plato as an educator of tyrants (both figuratively and literally), and there are readings of Plato as a feminist and supporter of 21st century liberal democracy. Then there is Aristotle's reading of Plato as a great friend and mentor, a brilliant mind, albeit wrong, whose ideas were the natural evolution from his study of Heraclitus, Cratylus, Parmenides, Empedocles, the Pythagoreans, and then Socrates himself.

These are only a few of the legion of interpretations of Plato and his thought. Naturally, due to sheer volume and variety, these readings and readers of Plato come into conflict with one another, amicably or otherwise. A hearty portion of the friction within Platonic scholarship seemingly stems from disagreement about *how to read* Plato—how we approach oblique texts and what we ought to look for—tension born of methodological disagreement. Another portion of the disagreement stems from the oblique nature of the dialogues themselves and the lack of an Archimedean point of evaluation. Both points call us back again to the question of Plato's authorial intent and how we should distinguish his thoughts within his work, how we should read Plato. For logic dictates that there *is* an authentic reading—whatever Plato intended while writing.

The reader might perhaps be so inclined to put forth the objection that countless things in the history of philosophy lack universal agreement, and that philosophers and scholars have since the inception of philosophy quibbled over all manner of things. Nevertheless, such an objection simply illustrates my point on a macro scale; that there is a lack of agreement about truth, and philosophy's inability to facilitate it. Again, the problem to which I wish to draw attention is that of authorial intent and interpretation, specifically concerning the works of Plato. As good historians of philosophy and philosophers, if we are to be such, whenever we engage with one of the greats, we want to get the arguments right, and we want to get the ideas right. While the problem of authorial intent and interpretation is present *in some way* whenever we approach the work of one of the greats, I think the problem is present when we approach Plato in a way that it simply is not with Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, or Kant.

Now, I wish to share with you what I take to be three primary elements for why Plato's authorial intent is so unclear, and I think these three elements are at the core of why the discussion in *Platonic Studies* is especially viscous and divisive. But I am reluctant to share them. For men of letters in our age are hasty to judge that they disagree, often before turning over each argument slowly to evaluate its truth. Besides, these three factors and their subsequent truth are so simple, so intuitive to good sense, that anyone even of the milder common sense realizes them when studying Plato. And my readers, who owe me no obligation, being undoubtedly charitable and men of acumen, are likely already aware of these truths and their implications. For these reasons I am reluctant to share these elements, on the one hand, in view of the haste and contentiousness of the modern scholar, on the other hand, as previously mentioned, because my readers are likely already aware of them. One is rightly reluctant to sow seeds with those overeager to harvest, and it is little more than good gesture to share hard bread with those who have plenty.

Yet it is far more likely that my few readers, owing me no obligation, are men of the proper sort rather than minds obstinate. And for this reason, I should have no worry of being subject to unfair and hasty judgment. What is more, though my readers are likely aware already of the three elements I outline shortly, it does no harm to myself or philosophy to share them outright. If at all, it is my own nature and the pursuit of truth that obliges me to share them here and the consequences that follow subsequent.

These three principal elements, if we reflect on them in a moderate light yield a variety of fruitful upshots for our reading and understanding of Plato's philosophy. However, the chief negative consequence of these three elements, as I see it (the three to which I come in but a moment), is that the problem of interpretation is amplified—we get the use and abuse of interpretation, a practice *not* confined to the study of Plato. Let us now examine these three elements one by one.

1.3 The Seventh Letter

First of three, there is Plato's *Seventh Letter*. The *Seventh Letter* gives an autobiographical account of Plato's activities in Sicily—detailing how he, at the bidding of his friend Dion, tried to educate and convert Dionysus of Syracuse, a tyrant, to a life of philosophy and failed. What are of especial interest are Plato's following statements in the *Seventh Letter* concerning the

“most important points” of philosophy. Plato writes, “There is no writing of mine about these matters, nor will there ever be one. For *this* knowledge is not something that can be put into words like other sciences; but after long-continued intercourse between teacher and pupil, in joint pursuit of the subject, suddenly, like light flashing forth when a fire is kindled, it is born in the soul and straightaway nourishes itself” (Ltr. 341c-d).³

Plato seemingly professes to never have written anything down about the most important points of philosophy. But he has more to say in the letter. “On this account,” he says “no sensible man will venture to express his deepest thoughts in words, especially in a form which is unchangeable, as is true of written outlines” (343a). No sensible man will write his thoughts down in a frank and unchangeable manner. And again, “anyone who is seriously studying high matters,” Plato says, “will be the last to write about them and thus expose his thought to the envy and criticism of men. What I have said comes, in short, to this: whenever we see a book, whether the laws of a legislator, or a composition of any other subject, we can be sure that if the author is *really serious*, this book does not contain his best thoughts; they are stored away with the fairest of his possessions. And if he has committed these serious thoughts to writing, it is because men, not the gods, “have taken his wits away”” (344c).⁴ These are very curious passages indeed.

With the bold statements of the *Seventh Letter*, we can sense a shadow of doubt creeping over the Platonic corpus. We might ask ourselves whether Plato truly kept his best thoughts to himself, and whether he chose to share any of his real thoughts with us at all. Might it be possible, probable, or even a fact that Plato kept his views to himself, stored away with his fairest possessions? If such is the case, perhaps we might and should reconsider the doctrines that we take as quintessentially Platonic, and perhaps it is worthwhile to spend some time reflecting and reassessing how we approach Plato’s dialogues. After all, Plato does say explicitly in the *Letter* (if we grant its authenticity) that there is no writing of his on these matters, on the “most important points.” Yet, the reader might pose an objection—can we not call into question the authenticity of this letter and the letters as a collection? We can, and, certainly, some do.⁵

³ Emphasis mine. I am following Cooper’s abbreviations for the dialogues. See Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.), 1746.

⁴ Emphasis mine.

⁵ Myles Burnyeat and Michael Frede, *The Pseudo-Platonic Seventh Letter*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 224. Julia Annas, “Classical Greek Philosophy,” in *The Oxford History of Greece and the Hellenistic World*, ed. Boardman, Griffin and Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 285.

However, there is a tinge of irony here. On the one hand, if the letter is real, then we must entertain seriously the hypothesis that Plato did not share with us his true thoughts and ideas. This provokes serious questions as to why Plato wrote the dialogues, and why did he choose their specific content. On the other hand, if this letter and the letters as a whole are phony, we lose the only sources where Plato authoritatively and explicitly tells us of his philosophic doctrines, some thoughts on philosophic writing, how we ought to pursue philosophy, some ideas about paideia (education), politics and its relationship to philosophy, and so on.

We thus face a dilemma. On the one hand, if Plato's *Seventh Letter* is authentic, Plato flatly admits he never wrote down his true thoughts for posterity. On the one other hand, if we remove the letter (with the other letters), we remove Plato's express claim that he has never shared his deepest thoughts in writing, which for some might be a relief. But if we remove the letters, we lose valuable information about Plato and his *only* express statements about his beliefs. In either case, then, whichever might be true, the question of Plato's personal philosophy remains perplexing. But let us put aside these trifles for the moment, and let us now turn to an element that mystifies Plato's thought all on its own. This brings us to our second element, Plato's choice of medium, the dialogue.

1.4 The Dialogues as a Medium

The second element for the unclarity of Plato's authorial intent in one sense builds off the first, in another sense, obscures Plato's thought independently. As we have just discussed, within the *Seventh Letter* Plato does not hold tracts in high regard. But if the letter is fake, then maybe Plato does hold tracts in high regards. We cannot say for sure. Regardless, he did not decide to write them, as far as we know. Instead, he chose to write in dialogue form, historical fiction that emulates a conversation, often between and among friends.

Let us reflect together on Plato's dialogues as dialogues. When we approach these intimate, fictional conversations, we might ask ourselves what to look for and where to look when we want to 'find' Plato. Is Plato's view that of a specific character, perhaps his beloved Socrates? Do we look to the 'arguments' and attribute to Plato those *logoi* that go unrefuted or that which goes unsaid? Perhaps Plato weaves his views into the subtleties of the dialogues—the slave boy's hand on Socrates' cloak, compelling his dear teacher to turn around, or erotic Alcibiades' bursting through the door, interrupting Aristophanes' objection to Socrates. Or, it

might be the case that Plato and his views are not present in his dialogues at all. Maybe his beautiful creations are mere philosophic play. When it comes to exploring the dialogues, there seems to be a buffet of angles to choose from, and most angles are interesting in their own right, yielding fascinating and delightful results. However, it is exceptionally difficult to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that any of these reading strategies, independent or cumulatively, reveal the authoritative Plato. This difficulty stems from a lack of solid reference point—a lack of a ground-zero for inquiry, if you will.

Within Plato's fictional world of the dialogues, Plato never explicitly says which ideas or arguments his characters present are his own. Plato's own name is uttered in the dialogues only twice (Ap. 34a, 38b, Phd. 59b), and he never presents himself as a speaking participant. Because of the ambiguous nature of the dialogues and for lack of a solid reference point, to say that a particular argument is the unequivocal view of Plato is unprovable. To say that a particular character is Plato's spokesman is highly questionable, and this includes his beautiful Socrates. Rather, we might be right to think that Plato at the very least entertains every argument within his dialogues, and Plato is all and none of his characters.⁶

The course of our discussion suggests that the inner workings of Plato's mind remain a sphinxlike enigma within the province of the dialogues, independent of the authenticity of the *Seventh Letter*. The chief reasons why Plato's thoughts remain so unclear is because (a) the medium of the dialogue obscures them, or (b) Plato chose to obscure them within the medium of the dialogue, or (c) both (a) and (b), and (d) the lack of a solid reference point. And observations (a), (b), (c), and in some sense (d) only float insofar as we presuppose that Plato wove his sincere thoughts into his dialogues at all. Independent of the authenticity of the *Seventh Letter*, if Plato chose *not* to weave his sincere thoughts into the dialogues, then points (a), (b), (c), and (d) are irrelevant. But even if Plato *did* weave his innermost thoughts into his dialogues, we have no way to be certain that we indeed know one of his views if we perchance discover one, on the one hand, nor can we prove beyond a reasonable doubt what these views are with the text as a reference, on the other hand. A worrisome difficulty indeed.

⁶ Catherine H. Zuckert, *Plato's Philosophers: The Coherence of the Dialogues*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 13 n.25.

In light of these observations, I think John M. Cooper speaks reasonably when he says, “It is important to realize that whatever is stated in [Plato’s] works is stated by one or another of his characters, *not* directly by Plato the author; in his writings he is not presenting his ‘truth’ and himself as its possessor, and he is not seeking glory for it.”⁷ Cooper asks of us a certain openness when approaching Plato, a willingness to be speculative toward the meanings within the dialogues and Plato’s own thoughts. Moreover, I tend to broadly agree with Cooper when he goes on to say that it is “in the writing as a whole that” Plato speaks, “not in the words of any single speaker.”⁸

Cooper speaks well and his approach is reasonable in light of our discussion. If such were the case—if one speaker were undoubtedly Plato’s own voice—then we would have a very clear and relatively undisputable picture of Plato’s ideas. But we do not. We thus cannot assume any principal speaker is Plato’s mouthpiece. Without a solid point of reference to evaluate Plato’s thoughts, we can assert with reasonable conscience that we ought to take everything Plato writes in each dialogue into consideration, evaluating each dialogue and its parts, including the argument and dramatic setting, with respect to the particular dialogue and with regard to the Platonic corpus as a whole. We can assert this all the while being aware that Plato might have chosen to keep his innermost thoughts to himself.

1.5 Knowing Another as You Know Yourself

For those reading attentively, the problem of interpretation, and by extension the problems for esoteric readings of Plato, now takes definite shape. It does not seem as though we can know, or know if we know, or prove that we know, Plato’s sincere thoughts on the basis of what he wrote for the reasons we outline above. But let us add a third layer of complication. I will frame the third element in the form of a question: Can we know the thoughts and mind of another as intimately as we know our own? In one sense yes, in a larger sense no. We want to say yes because we can communicate in a meaningful way, and we like to think that empathy and sympathy are possible. And we want to say yes insofar as when we read the works of another, and when those works express ideas clearly and succinctly, like those of Aquinas and Cicero, we

⁷ Plato, *Complete Works*, xix.

⁸ Plato, *Complete Works*, xx.

want to say we can understand. But in some sense our experiences are ultimately and radically our own. This strikes me as intuitively true by virtue of our nature as subjective beings.

To contextualize our point, it can be very difficult to grasp the mind and thoughts of another in everyday conversation. We misunderstand each other all the time. It is increasingly difficult to grasp the mind and thoughts of another who speaks a different language—for instance, a new study suggests that people who know two languages experience time differently than those who only speak their mother tongue.⁹ We might also consider differences of time and context. Humans are historical beings. When trying to understand the minds of others from ages past, it is truly difficult to conceive of their framework of interpretation. One might reflect on the differences of conventions, convictions, beliefs, technology, science, and knowledge between the Greeks and ourselves. The Greeks had no concept of the Americas, political economy, or social media; thus they understood themselves in relation to nature and the cosmos in a way altogether alien to most Westerners today.

With the awareness of these differences and difficulties in mind, we recognize that there are considerable obstacles to grasping the thoughts and mind of another. Many of us experience these obstacles daily in misunderstandings of meaning. Though conveying meaning in conversation can be difficult, the beauty of conversation is that it is fluid. With conversation, we can find a variety of ways to rearticulate ourselves and demystify ambiguity to convey our meaning. This is not always the case with written works. Writers do not always have the luxury to clarify what they mean, and this luxury is altogether gone once they perish. Even excellently clear writers can and do make mistakes, and the dictates of necessity, be it persecution or simple obligation, can prevent a writer from expressing his ideas clearly. Further, the shifting gears of time inevitably erode languages and frameworks of interpretation from which the texts were written.

Innumerable factors can shroud the intended meaning of a text. It can be exceedingly difficult to grasp the meaning of a tract, let alone the meaning woven into a symbolically pregnant world of fiction. Just consider the Everest of a task of, say, divining the political or religious thought of Tolkien or Shakespeare. From these considerations, in Plato's case, it is

⁹ Emanuel Bylund and Panos Athanasopoulos, "The Whorfian Time Warp: Representing Duration Through the Language Hourglass," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 2017.

distinctly difficult to grasp his mind and deepest thoughts from his dialogues, especially when he suggests they simply might not be there. Thus when intelligent men and scholars suggest we should try and can understand the greats as they understood themselves, context and all, there is something truly noble and scholarly about that endeavor. Yet in another sense, this project is doomed to failure. Besides the obvious epistemic impossibility of knowing a mind other than one's own, an infinite number of accidental factors, biological and environmental, influence a mind that one must account for. For these reasons, I cannot get onboard the historicist thesis, and because of these three elements collectively, Plato's philosophy remains enigmatic and unknown. We can at best speculate about Plato's thought.

1.6 How Do We Read Plato, and Why?

With these three points, independently and collectively, we distinguish some pronounced hurdles obstructing our knowledge of Plato. Succinctly, it certainly does not seem we can know, know if we know, or prove that we know, Plato's sincere thoughts on the basis of what he wrote. With the impediments to our knowledge of Plato's thought established, we cannot help but become aware of the jarring limitations to interpretation of Platonic texts. So let us explore together the problems of interpreting Plato and the troublesome interpretations that stem from these limitations, centering our gaze on a chief problem, the use and abuse of interpretation.

Naturally we are left wondering what to look for in the dialogues, how to navigate them, and about all how to differentiate between good and bad readings of Plato. On this matter, I am sympathetic to the position of C. J. Rowe. He writes, "I take it either as a given, or more usually as the conclusion of an argument, that there are not merely wrong ways of reading Plato, but that there is in broad terms a right way, which we can discover—or to which we can approximate—on the basis of what he wrote."¹⁰ Rowe is not speaking in absolutes. There is a right way to reading Plato that we can discover and approximate in *broad terms*. We can distinguish between better and worse approaches and readings to Plato by means of argument. That is, better and worse readings and ways of reading of Plato depend on their ability to weather serious questioning and scrutiny, cross-examination, and support themselves with textual evidence. This is how we separate wheat from chaff.

¹⁰ C. J. Rowe, "Killing Socrates: Plato's Later Thoughts on Democracy," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 121 (2001): 63.

We might note that Rowe seems to be speaking predominantly of historicity and philology, not exegetical esotericism and hermeneutics. But what about exegetical esoteric and hermeneutic readings of Plato? These readings and methods of reading possess a considerable academic following, and these interpretations compose a large sum of the academic literature on Plato. Do these methods and readings fall into the “broad terms” of the right way of reading Plato, and are they legitimate? Let us pursue this latter line of inquiry, bearing in mind our forgoing considerations.

1.7 Hermeneutics, Exegesis, and Eisegesis

The legitimacy of an esoteric¹¹ reading of a text hinges on the intent of the methodologist. Let it be said that, with regards to historicity, proving the legitimacy of an esoteric interpretation of an author is exceptionally difficult. Plato is no exception. The difficulty stems from both the methodological process of reading esoterically and its ‘object’ for lack of a better word. Oftentimes, esoteric interpretations either go beyond the text or identify and interpret unsaid meaning from subtleties within a text, such as equivocation or an unfinished argument. From these factors, the scholar, applying his method to the text, moves *from* the text to reflect on a transcendent subject matter or find *within* or *behind* the written word a hidden idea. While a scholar might uncover or divine a myriad of fascinating ideas from a text, the scholar faces the practical difficulty of either relating the transcendent back to said text, of demonstrating the hidden word within the written word, or both. Rooting non-explicit, hidden, and transcendent ideas back in the text from which, and by means of which, the researching scholar thinks these ideas, and proving that the author of the text in question indeed held, entertained, and/or sought to convey subtly these same ideas to a careful reader, is the chief challenge to the legitimacy of esoteric interpretations of texts. Candidly, *demonstration* is the chief challenge to the legitimacy of esoteric readings.

Reading esoterically and esoteric interpretations carry a heavy burden of proof. Yet I do not think we should simply dismiss esotericism. Not all things need demonstration, just most

¹¹ When I use the word esoteric in reference to reading, I am juxtaposing it to exoteric reading. An exoteric reading is the common sense, surface, and literal reading of a text. Alternatively, an esoteric reading, while acknowledging the exoteric element dimension of a text, is open to, or aims at, an inner or elevated teaching. When I use the term ‘esoteric’ I am strictly referring to reading as method and its object. I use the word in a way that drains the term of its lace curtain overtones, and I distance myself from those who use it in the classificatory sense. The word predominantly refers to secret or hidden knowledge and the means as method to its access, though the word’s meaning seems to now lean toward its social idiosyncrasy.

things.¹² There seems to be two primary ways of reading esoterically to which I allude earlier in passing, hermeneutics and exegesis. Though many use these words interchangeably, I think the two are distinct.

By hermeneutics, I refer to a theory and method of interpretation. ‘Hermeneutics’ derives from the Greek ἐρμηνεία (stemming from the verb ἐρμηνεύω, to interpret, explain, expound), meaning interpretation, explanation, or translation. Often this method distinguishes between the exoteric message (the literal written word) and the esoteric message (the hidden or revealed word). Hermeneutics as a method involves the presupposition, or is open to the possibility, that the written word masks hidden or unwritten truths, and it seeks to reveal or conceal these truths. What is peculiar about hermeneutics, however, is its alleged relationship to the messenger between Olympians and men, Hermes.¹³ As a messenger between mortals and immortals, and as a ferryman of souls to the underworld, Hermes is the maintainer and transgressor of boundaries. And I think hermeneutics involves something akin to a transgression of boundaries. For instance, hermeneuticists might make the distinction between the sacred and profane in relation to text, along with the processes of revealing and concealing of truth. There also seems to be character of hermeneutics an affinity for the spiritual and suprarational, captured in the sublimity and suddenness of a revelatory message from the gods. There is something inherently ‘mystical,’ dialogical, and beyond reason to hermeneutics.

Exegesis is not altogether different from hermeneutics. Exegesis derives from the Greek ἐξήγησις, meaning statement, narrative, explanation, or interpretation. ἐξήγησις derives from ἐξηγέομαι, which is a compound of ἡγέομαι (I lead the way, guide (alternative ἀγέομαι)) and ἐκ (out, away). ἐξηγέομαι literally translates as “I lead the way out.” We can think of ἐξήγησις as a method of leading the way out of a text. Like hermeneutics, there can be a spiritual dimension to exegesis. However, I do not think the potential suprarational elements of exegesis are as pronounced as they are in hermeneutics. This is because exegesis seems to be narrower than hermeneutics. Exegesis is not predominantly an esoteric project, but a *historical* project. Anything esoteric or suprarational that exegesis investigates is for the purposes of the historical. While exegesis is open to many of the same textual and noetic possibilities as hermeneutics, exegesis seems to be overall less inclined to the suprarational and more inclined to the

¹² Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. J. A. Smith and W. D. Ross, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), 1005b35–1006a12.

¹³ We discuss Hermes at greater length later in the thesis.

superrational. Exegesis is thus inherently more analytic than hermeneutics. For exegesis seeks to ‘lead the way out,’ to begin with the text *qua* text and ‘draw out’ the meaning of the author *qua* meaning of the author.

Let us consider these two methods and their differences in greater detail, and let us evaluate whether or not they are of merit. Very generally, hermeneutics draws inward, while exegesis negotiates paths outward. Specifically, the primary differences between exegesis and hermeneutics seem to be scope, the object sought, and the means by which one obtains one’s sought object. Hermeneutics’ scope is broader than that of exegesis. While exegesis explores the text *qua* text to understand the author in relation to the text, what hermeneutics regards as ‘text’ goes beyond the literal text. For the sake of simplicity, we might say that hermeneutics explores λόγος,¹⁴ which can manifest in a variety of ways infinitely broader than the literal written word. Because hermeneutics presupposes λόγος can manifest in a myriad of different ways, hermeneutics as an approach can be much more versatile, elastic, and removed or ahistorical as unchained from time than exegesis. For these reasons, hermeneutics can and does pursue λόγος in a variety of different ways. But the nature of λόγος and whether λόγος is the end of hermeneutics is unclear. I am inclined to think that λόγος is not the end of hermeneutics, but that λόγοι are representative of the sought objects of hermeneutics. We might say that, in many ways, though not exclusively, hermeneutics as a method places the individual on the horizon of time and history to reflect on those things perennial and divine that reside there.¹⁵

The scope of exegesis, in juxtaposition to hermeneutics, is much more narrow. While the ‘text’ for hermeneutics can go beyond the literal written and spoken word, exegesis, being a “leading out” of a literal text, consistently engages with and returns to the text *qua* text. For example, though exegesis, like hermeneutics, allows for esotericism, exegesis invariably seeks to root esoterica within the text *qua* text and attribute it to its author, unlike hermeneutics, which allows esoterica to be and to go beyond texts and authors. The exegete seeks to grasp the superrational only for the purposes of rationalizing and compartmentalizing it within the confines of a historical narrative.

¹⁴ Not necessarily in the Greek sense.

¹⁵ I thank my good friend Michael J. Elliot from Carleton University for his help in the development of this concept.

Allow me to illustrate my point with an example. Let us imagine that an exegete and hermeneuticist are evaluating and critiquing an artistic creation, Dürer's *Melencolia I*. After appreciating the piece thoroughly, suppose they both receive an impression that the ladder possesses symbolic significance. The exegete inquires whether the artist is trying to convey some meaning, and if he thinks the author *is* trying to convey a specific meaning, he tries to root the symbolism in the engraving and attribute its symbolic significance to the mind of the artist. Alternatively, the hermeneuticist might try to do the same thing as the exegete. Yet the hermeneuticist might go further to say that the symbolic meaning in the engraving goes beyond the engraving and its artist. In the mind of the hermeneuticist, perhaps the artist was merely a vessel, an unknowing and oblivious tool of the Muses, divinely inspired and animated to manifest a λόγος into art so that a thoughtful observer, our hermeneuticist, might recognize the symbol and be immediately inspired himself to reflect on the sublimity of the meaning in a higher context, independent of artist and the work of art. Candidly, the exegete remains chained to the medium and its author, while the hermeneuticist can and often does leave them both far behind.

The means by which the exegete obtains his object is not the same as the hermeneuticist. This is because the object of both respective methods seems to be in some ways the same, in other ways very different. We expose the objects of the methods in a moment. Though both the good exegete and hermeneuticist are undoubtedly careful and meticulous readers, the exegete seeks to reproduce by means of a text the mind of the author in question within himself. He seeks to reproduce in himself the mind of the author by means of the text so that he (the exegete) may understand the text as its author understood it, and understand the author as the author understood himself. Then he truly knows the authors intent, or so it would seem.

To achieve his goal, the exegete must approach the text scientifically. He must scrutinize every part of the text like a sedulous historian and psychological sleuth so that he may reconstruct the mind of the author within himself. Exegesis as a method leans toward scientific history, i.e., historicism, and the exegete is akin to a scientific historian, a Basil Hallward of minds. To fulfill his exegetical project, the approach or mindset of the exegete and the application of his method is staunchly historical, staunchly rational, analytic, *scientific*, but open to esotericism. Yet the exegete's interest in esotericism begins and ends only insofar as it is a

fine detail to fill in his reconstructive project, his intellectual portrait. He and his aims are intimate with and bound to the text in a way that a hermeneuticist is not. Hermeneutics, alternatively, does not seem to have a set approach to its object other than the openness to pursue λόγος in whatever form it manifests. Anything, be it conversation, art, music, philosophy, nature, or *divine inspiration* can serve as the ‘text’ from which the hermeneuticist pursues λόγος, and once the hermeneuticist catches sight of a λόγος, he pursues it in whatever way he might, like a hound chasing a hare.

What remains are the objects of the respective methods in question, hermeneutics and exegesis. The objects of both respective methods seem to be in some ways the same, in other ways very different. By object, I do not mean the ‘texts,’ but that for the sake of which the methods are employed. For we till the fields, sow, and nurture not for the sake of the seeds, but to harvest the fruit of our labour. The object, or objects, of both methods, and all methods, are truths and the truth in some way—truth about being. The truths for the sake of which the hermeneuticist and exegete employ their respective methods are similar insofar as the truths sought are perennial in some way, i.e., they share in *the* truth about being, what is. Yet these truths are distinct insofar as they are different truths *part* of the truth. The exegete seeks a specific historical truth, the hermeneuticist a revealed truth. Yet these truths may overlap and in some sense do. The truths sought are distinct insofar as the parts of the whole are distinct. The truths sought overlap insofar as the parts form the whole. Let us now reflect on these methods with regards to interpreting Plato’s dialogues and their potential esoteric content.

Anything that pursues truth is noble. Yet both exegesis and hermeneutics as interpretive methods to reading Plato face obstacles. Let us discuss the issues from a general standpoint, beginning with exegesis. The exegete seeks to know and understand another as the other knows and understands themselves by means of their work and context. He does this by scrutinizing the text, understanding the language, its context, and so on, in an effort to refabricate in his mind the mind of another. Yet it is precisely here where the exegete faces an impasse. To know something, one must know its causes. To really understand the mind of another as another understands himself, the exegete must account for all the contingencies that inform another mind’s framework of interpretation.

To know and understand the mind of another as it knows and understands itself, the exegete must account for the contingencies that inform and shape the mind of another on a conscious level. Yet, if the exegete seeks to know, and if to know something one must know its causes, and if the exegete must account for the contingencies that inform and shape the mind of another on a conscious level to know it, then it follows that the exegete must know the sub contingencies that inform the contingencies that inform and shape the mind of another on a conscious level. That is to say, if the exegete is to know the conscious contingencies, it is necessary that he know the *causes* of these conscious contingencies in order to *know* these conscious contingencies. He must come to know the causes of those conscious contingencies, the cause of which are in many cases *unconscious* contingencies, such as biology or environment. Thus the exegete, to account for the contingencies that inform and shape the mind of another at a conscious level, *must know the causes of causes*, the causes of the conscious contingencies.

For the exegete to fulfill the historicist project—and this is indeed a historicist project, the project to capture the *authentic* Plato as he was—the exegete would need to know and understand the mind of another as the other knows and understands themselves, *and* the exegete would need to know and understand the contingencies and context that inform the mind of another. Candidly, the exegetical project seeks to know and understand another *better* than the other knows and understands themselves. Yet herein lays a problem. Exegesis as a historicist project cannot fulfill its goal. Exegesis as outlined cannot fulfill its goal because it is at heart a science of accidents in the broad sense. Because accidents never remain the same or for the most part, and because accidents are infinite in number and relative, we cannot have a science of them.

In the case of Plato, like any other developed human being, many accidents informed his mind and framework of interpretation—childhood adventures, personal success and failures, love and heartbreak, and so on—and the sands of time reduce these accidents to ash. The greater share of the accidents and contingencies that inform Plato's psychology as a framework of interpreting the world—his mind—are unknown and lost to us. We cannot know them, just as we cannot provide a comprehensive account of ourselves. From our discussion, it follows that no one can know Plato and understand Plato as he knew and understood himself, and it follows that intellectual historicism pursues an impossible project, a project that is tantamount to an effort to collapse the subject and object of inquiry into one. From these considerations, the scrupulous

exegete can do an excellent job recovering the historical Plato, which is a noble ambition and project of extraordinary value. Yet, because the exegete cannot know and understand the mind of another as another knows and understands themselves (or *better*) in light of the failure of historicism as a science of accidents, the exegete can never claim authority to know the esoteric content of a text. He cannot 'lead out' of the text an esoteric reading that stands up to reasonable doubt, and we thus cannot trust his esoteric reading of Plato as historically authoritative. Such an esoteric reading is at best speculative.

The obstacles to the legitimacy of hermeneutic approaches to Plato are in some sense different than those of exegesis, in some sense the same. While exegesis is a staunchly historical project, hermeneutics is fundamentally ahistorical. While the manifold of particulars, accidents, causes, contingencies, and, in a word, the *details* of history are what hinder exegesis, the shortcoming of hermeneutics as an interpretive method to Plato is its inability to ground itself in a text or historically. We can see this insofar as the hermeneuticist removes himself from his context, retiring to the horizon of time and history. Hermeneutics is historical to the extent that the hermeneuticist withdraws from his context for the purposes of pursuing a λόγος and gazing on perennial truth and understanding this truth in relation to himself and his context. Yet forwarding an authoritative account of Plato or any author does not seem to be the aim of the hermeneuticist, but to strive for higher truths by whatever means required, spontaneous intuition and revelation non-excluded.

Hermeneutics can be rational and can be approached rationally. Yet the focus of hermeneutics is neither a rational explanation of the truths it pursues, nor the ways it accesses these truths. I say this because hermeneutics does not rule out accessing truths by irrational and suprarational means, and because some of the truths in question might be beyond reason, such as divine inspiration. Hermeneutics is peculiar to itself. Hermeneutics is not philosophy, but it can be philosophic. Hermeneutics is not theology, but it can be religious and spiritual. In many ways, the hermeneutic project is similar to the undertaking outlined in the Allegory of the Cave. Yet hermeneutics is open to accessing truth in ways closer to that of a poet, theologian, or a mystic than a philosopher does. For these reasons, I cannot help but see hermeneutics as conducive to a multidimensional mysticism au fond, and mysticism is a personal project of dialogical transcendence. Flatly, because a hermeneuticist cannot root their esoteric readings of Plato in the

text and demonstrate their authenticity, we cannot trust their historical authority or legitimacy. Such an esoteric reading is at best speculative.

Demonstration is the fundamental obstacle to esoteric readings, and this includes esoteric readings of Plato. Within the confines of esotericism in Platonic texts, exegetes and hermeneuticists cannot demonstrate what they claim to know. If they cannot provide proof that Plato wrote esoterically, that Plato himself held esoteric ideas, and if they cannot bridge back to Plato by means of demonstration these alleged esoteric ideas that they claim to know on the basis of what Plato wrote or otherwise, then we cannot trust the authenticity of these claims any more than we can trust the claims of a tasseographer. I say this neither out of disrespect nor because I am pedantically ‘analytic,’ but because esoteric interpretations of Plato that posture themselves as historical fact cannot overcome even the mild skepticism of a reasonable doubt. And if we do not challenge such readings and pressure their proponents to provide evidence, and when these sorts of interpretations go unquestioned, the result is eisegesis, retrojection, or its modern name, ‘historical revisionism.’

Eisegesis in Greek is εἰσῆγησις. εἰσῆγησις derives from εἰσηγέομαι, which is a compound of ἡγέομαι (I lead the way, guide (alternative ἄγέομαι)) and εἰς (into). εἰσηγέομαι literally translates as ‘I bring in,’ ‘I introduce,’ or ‘I lead into.’ We can think of εἰσῆγησις as an approach that brings in, leads into a text. Candidly, εἰσῆγησις is reading into a text. But what is being read into the text? Eisegesis is reading into a text ideas that are not there, specifically one’s own ideas. Eisegetical readings are thus historically false. Eisegetic interpretations can be either intentional or unintentional. Interpretations are eisegetical when an interpreter attributes falsehoods¹⁶ to a text and its author as fact. An interpretation is *suspect* of eisegesis when it can neither demonstrate its fact claim nor provide evidence that skirts skepticism of a reasonable doubt. Within the domain of Plato scholarship or any scholarship within philosophy, the label of ‘eisegete’ is an insult.

Eisegesis is the consequence of ignorance or poor conscience. By ignorance, I do not mean unsophistication or stupidity, but the simple lack of knowledge or information in some way. We are all ignorant, even the best and most learned. When we interpret Plato and attribute

¹⁶ By falsehoods, I mean things that are false, not necessarily false premises.

to him ideas that we cannot prove he holds, either by accident or by conviction with lack of evidence, we engage in eisegesis out of ignorance. To engage in eisegesis out of ignorance is not a bad thing, but a false thing. This is a mistake, we all make mistakes, and making mistakes is part of learning. Yet when we interpret Plato and attribute to him ideas that we cannot prove he holds *intentionally*, we engage in eisegesis out of poor conscience. To engage in eisegesis out of poor conscience is both a bad thing and a false thing—pure, dishonest misrepresentation. These observations are not true exclusively for Plato, but for all scholarship. But if we entertain these observations seriously, then most interpretations of Plato are eisegetical in some way, and all esoteric readings of Plato are eisegetical insofar as they cannot demonstrate what they claim to know and cannot provide evidence for esoteric content that can overcome the skepticism of a reasonable doubt.

It would seem that almost no study of a text can completely escape eisegesis. That is, no study of a text, historical, esoteric, or both can escape subjective bias altogether. *All* exegesis and almost all scholarship in the history of philosophy is eisegetical in some way. We are all guilty of reading our own thoughts into texts, at one time or another, for the most part. However, in light of all the reasons we outline in our former discussion, Plato's dialogues, due to their openness, richness, and lack of authoritative voice, are especially susceptible to eisegetical readings. Above all, Plato's dialogues are susceptible to those eisegetical readings of poor conscience.

We can recognize intuitively that eisegesis of poor conscience is contemptible. If the scholarly mission is Truth, eisegesis is antithetical to this mission. Regardless if the aim of the scholar is historical accuracy, philosophic commentary, what have you, conscious eisegesis is false, deceiving, and above all cowardly. Eisegesis of poor conscience is cowardly because it reflects an unwillingness to speak forth one's own thoughts. Instead, one plays tricks on the living and the dead, attributing to others ideas they do not hold as fact, posturing one's work as genuine, honest scholarship. Eisegesis of poor conscience is *politic* writing in its basest form. Though I recognize the utility of politic writing, I ask my readers to pardon my Laconian frankness and diplomacy on the matter, for my fear of revisionism is greater than my fear of censorship.

With our forgoing discussion and considerations in mind, it is now clear that in many ways Plato's philosophy remains enigmatic and unknown to us. In the course of our discussion,

we examine the consequence of the *Seventh Letter*, the medium of dialogue, and reflect on a truth of philosophy of mind in relation to interpreting Plato's philosophy based on what he wrote. We became aware of the limitations of exegesis and hermeneutics, not only with regards to themselves as methods, but also to interpreting Plato. From our discussion of exegesis and hermeneutics within the confines of our discussion of method more generally, we uncover how slapdash application of method or sheer poor conscious lead to eisegesis, an obstacle and hindrance to the pursuit for truth. From our discussion, it follows that we cannot know and understand Plato as he knew and understood himself based on what he wrote; as consequence, Plato's philosophy thus remains enigmatic; and our interpretations of Plato—esoteric, historic, or both—reflect these observations insofar as they cannot present an authoritative interpretation beyond reasonable doubt. Our study thus begs a question: Where do we go from here?

1.8 Review

Let us recapitulate the problems at hand surrounding Plato and his dialogues, setting the issues out clearly before us so that we might devise together a path to tread forward. There seems to be two categories of problems that hinder the deciphering of Plato's philosophy. These problems conveniently fall under two general headings—problems of object, and problems of subject. Just as the subject and the object necessitate each other, so too are these problems in some sense symbiotic, though all the problems are *for* a subject, just as all objects are objects *for* a subject.

First, let us recall the problems of the object, Plato's written work, for a subject. The two problems of object are Plato's *Seventh Letter* and his chosen medium for philosophy, the dialogues. The *Seventh Letter* contains explicit statements that Plato never wrote down his innermost thoughts on philosophy, and perhaps never ventured to “express his deepest thoughts in words” at all. The second, the dialogues as a medium, pose a problem for interpretation insofar as they are obscurely written and are without a solid point of reference to grasp Plato's train of thought. Together, the *Seventh Letter* and the dialogues cast a shroud of ambiguity over Plato's philosophy.

As for the problems of subject for interpretation, the chief among them is our inability to know the mind of another as we know our own mind. In fact, it seems as though subjective limitation is the root of all problems of interpretation and understanding. Limitations to the

subjective ability to know hamper all manners of human inquiry, be they limitations of senses, noetic abilities, relegation to particular place and space, or what have you.

Combined, these problems of object and subject highlight our subjective limitations and the immense objective difficulties preventing us from understanding Plato on the basis of what he wrote. On the one hand, the dialogues as a medium obscure Plato's voice, because the dialogues *entirely* are the written ideas of Plato. On the other hand, the *Seventh Letter* calls into question whether Plato wove himself into his dialogues at all. In an effort to mediate the difficulties of subject and object when approaching written ideas, scholars have devised various methodologies as textual approaches. These textual approaches have given rise to differing schools of thought. But we have no need to discuss schools and sects here. What we want to do is know how to approach written philosophy, particularly Plato's.

From these observations, we agreed with Rowe, "that there are not merely wrong ways of reading Plato, but that there is in broad terms a right way."¹⁷ However, it was initially unclear how 'broad' this right way of reading is. If the goal of a scholar, a historian of philosophy, is to capture historical truth, we outline the various difficulties of capturing the historical Plato above that stem from the objective and subjective problems, especially if an exegete wishes to demonstrate an 'authentic' reading of Plato that includes esotericism. To be forthright, any claim to Plato's ideas that postures itself as 'historic' on the basis of the dialogues cannot shirk the skepticism of a reasonable doubt. This includes all methods, exegetical or otherwise, that seek and claim to capture the historic Plato. Alternatively, hermeneutics is a very different methodological project that does not adhere to the boundaries of the text, reason, or logic. Nor does it have to, though hermeneuticists may face serious scrutiny from those logically inclined or skeptical. To the point, demonstration is the fundamental obstacle to any method and interpretation that seeks and claims to capture the historic Plato's ideas.

We thus ask ourselves, where do we go from here? To return to Rowe's statement, when he says that there are not merely wrong ways of reading Plato, but that there is in broad terms a right way," we were initially uncertain exactly how broad the right and wrong ways of reading Plato are. We can blame Plato for the ambiguity of his work, but we cannot blame Plato for our

¹⁷ Rowe, *Killing Socrates*, 63.

inability to decipher it. That said, while there are a manifold of methods that yield fascinating results when applied to Plato's dialogues, discerning the historical Plato by means of his dialogues strikes me as a Sisyphean task. Bluntly, previous methodologies prove insufficient, and I take the testimonies of Plato's ideas, even those from Aristotle, with a grain of salt. Because methods that seek and claim to capture the historic Plato are lackluster, even the most rigorous, insofar as they fail to achieve their goal for lack of demonstration and certainty, perhaps we might look for alternatives to historicist methods and goals when approaching Plato and his dialogues. Perhaps Plato did not have the transferal of dogma in mind when writing his dialogues, and perhaps he did not wish to be historicized.

In wake of the broadness of Plato's dialogues, historicist approaches to Plato are Sisyphean, while hermeneutic approaches seem to be individualistic, almost personal mystic projects of transcendence that do not seem capable of meeting the requirements of academic scholarship in most cases. However, this does not mean that these approaches and projects are without value. Their chief issues are their goals, the means by which they attain these goals, whether or not they attain their goals, and the desire for adherence to logic and demonstration as broad academic standards. Because the right and wrong ways of reading Plato are so broad, the legitimacy of a reading of a text ultimately hinges on the intent, the method, and the product, and it is on this basis that we evaluate an interpretation of Plato. Frankly, what we ought to evaluate is what the methodologist seeks to do, how he does it, and whether or not he achieves his goal.

1.9 Eclecticism

The existent problems to which our discussion draws attention highlight the precarious state of contemporary Plato scholarship within a scientific paradigm. These problems necessitate a method that accounts for these very problems inherent to subjectivity and the obscure nature of Plato's dialogues, the reality of eisegesis as a scholarly phenomenon, yet a method that recognizes the significance of evidence and serious engagement with the text. Above all, *self-awareness* seems to be the key to a good approach and reading of the Greek philosopher, and the method in question must be *malleable*.

The method, or rather the philosophy I propose, is Eclecticism.¹⁸ Briefly, the word eclectic derives from the ancient Greek ἐκλεκτικός, “choosing what is worthy.” Eclecticism does not demand strict adherence to a specific doctrine or system of thought. It is not a specific method, but a metamodel. Eclectics borrow and adopt from various modes of thought and experience to pursue the truth, or they might reject absolute truth outright. An eclectic adopts what is probable, persuasive, and survives argument and scrutiny in a given case. The earliest case of the broad application of eclecticism in philosophy seems to be Aristotle. We find a good example of Aristotle’s eclecticism in Book Alpha of *Metaphysics*. In Book Alpha, Aristotle engages in a general survey of the ideas of his intellectual predecessors, adopting the persuasive ideas that withstand scrutiny and discarding those that do not. But let us turn to an example of eclecticism in Plato’s own academy, Philo of Larissa, the head of the ‘New Academy’ in the first century B.C.¹⁹ The ‘Old’ Academy maintained two foundational premises: (A) All things are incognitive (B) ergo, we should suspend judgment about all things.²⁰ These two tenets are the foundation of Academic Skepticism. Philo took the school in a different direction by abandoning dogmatic commitment to (B).²¹ Long and Sedley write, “On this basis [Philo] replaced skepticism with a modest fallibilism, which permitted the philosopher a wide range of opinions, subject only to the recognition that any one of them might be mistaken, and authorized ‘truth or approximation truth’ as the Academic’s objective—the foundation of Cicero’s own methodology.”²² Philo sought to present his philosophic outlook as the legitimate spiritual successor of Plato’s own philosophy.²³

Philo’s student, Antiochus of Ascalon, the teacher of Marcus Tullius Cicero, was also an eclectic. Unlike Philo who committed himself to the conviction that all things are incognitive (i.e., unknowable with absolute certainty), Antiochus committed himself to the idea that Plato was a fully dogmatic philosopher, and that the Stoics and Peripatetics “were the only true heirs of Platonism among his Hellenistic predecessors,” the Stoics especially grasping Plato’s

¹⁸ Eclecticism is by no means a philosophy original to me. It was present in the ancient world in the work of individual philosophers, though there was no formal school of Eclecticism.

¹⁹ A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. 1., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 448. For the sake of simplicity, I agree with Long and Sedley of Cicero’s classification of the ‘New’ Academy beginning with Arcesilaus and ending with Philo.

²⁰ Long and Sedley, *Hellenistic*, 446.

²¹ Long and Sedley, *Hellenistic*, 448.

²² Long and Sedley, *Hellenistic*, 449.

²³ *Ibid.*

conception of cognition.²⁴ Antiochus thus spent his life trying to reconcile Stoic, Peripatetic, and Platonic philosophy. Whereas Philo was eclectic insofar as he was willing to entertain a variety of opinions as plausibly true, Antiochus, like Aristotle, was eclectic insofar as he borrowed from various philosophies to cobble together a systematic account of the world. Both Philo and Antiochus defended their respective positions as “the true custodian of the Platonic tradition.”²⁵

From Philo to Cicero we can trace a pedigree of skepticism, though Philo himself claims he can trace his philosophic pedigree to Plato himself. Cicero is likely the best-known eclectic. Though he was the student of Antiochus, Cicero’s philosophy is closer to that of Philo. He is an academic skeptic, maintains that adopts whatever position he finds to be the most persuasive in a given situation, which we can see in his adoption of Stoic, Peripatetic, and Platonic ideas at times.²⁶ He writes, “For although I say nothing can be securely grasped, I am still ready to discourse on various matters.... [W]here other men say that some things are certain and others uncertain, we disagree with them and say rather that some things are persuasive and others not.”²⁷

We have before us a general sketch of Eclecticism as a metamechanism and various different examples of applied eclecticism. With Philo and Cicero, due to their fundamental supposition that all things are incognitive, apply eclecticism to philosophy in such a way that one engages in philosophy by engaging in a sort of self-serve at the buffet of the various philosophies available, selecting ideas here and there according to their persuasiveness in any given circumstance. Their philosophies seem *necessarily* eclectic by virtue of their first principles and goal. Aristotle and Antiochus, on the other hand, are much more rigid when applying eclecticism. They have distinct conceptions of truth, cognition, and what can be known, and their respective aims are to develop an account of being as it is. Their philosophies, due to their first principles, can be eclectic only in a limited way if they are to remain consistent with their accounts of being *qua* being.

²⁴ Long and Sedley, *Hellenistic*, 449.

²⁵ Ibid. On the evolution of the Academy, we might note another comment from Long and Sedley, that among the Ancients and within the Academy itself, “In fact there had been no consensus interpretation of Plato’s philosophy at any time since his death, some seventy five years before Arcesilaus’ election.” Further, they pose a question we cannot help but direct at Plato scholars: “If a consistently aporetic Plato seems a distortion now, is it any more so than the Neoplatonic focus upon a few select passages as the heart of a supposedly Platonic doctrine?” Long and Sedley, *Hellenistic*, 445-446. Emphasis mine.

²⁶ Cicero, *On Duties*, ed. E. M. Atkins, trans. M. T. Griffin, trans. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 4.

²⁷ Cicero, *Duties*, 65.

This descriptive account of eclecticism will not satisfy those that want to hear eclecticism “itself extolled all by itself.” We can easily describe what eclectics do—they borrow, choose, and synthesize various ideas from various sources. Yet what *is* eclecticism? Frankly, eclecticism is choosing what is worthy of choice. In its barest form, eclecticism necessitates a subject and potential variables to choose from. Eclecticism is the ground zero, the default state, of philosophy, the conscious choosing of what opinions one holds, whether truth is accessible or not, and so on. How eclecticism is applied and the degree to which it is malleable depends on the variables available along with one’s first principles and goals. If one is devoid of principles and goals, and if there is a great variety of variables available, one’s philosophy and application of eclecticism can be malleable and fluid in a way that one adhering to strict first principles and goals cannot be. To draw from our earlier examples, an eclectic skeptic, from the basis of first principles, can be fluid in his application of eclecticism in a way an Aristotelian or Stoic cannot due partially to presuppositions about the nature of knowledge, knowing, and the cosmos. Alternatively, from a different perspective, consider the various lifestyles a nihilist can find worthy of choice in comparison to a practicing traditional Catholic. An authentic nihilist has no scruple about living any mode of life, even the most degenerate, while for a traditional Catholic a moral life and communion with God are of utmost importance.

Essential to a good eclectic approach to a text is awareness, especially self-awareness. Or, to be pedantic, essential to a good eclectic approach to a text is an awareness of one’s capacity for awareness generally and self-awareness. What I mean is awareness of subjective and objective limitation. I use some equivocation here. By awareness of subjective limitation, I mean awareness of one’s first principles, biases, personal intent or goal, and the boundaries of one’s abilities. By awareness of objective limitation, I mean the limitations of one’s scholarly intent or goal yet also the limitations and boundaries of the text *qua* text. Thus, the first step of eclecticism seems to be a sort of meditation, a reflection on one’s self, one’s goal, the text, the contingencies, and so on, a looking inward and outward.

The next step of a good approach is a statement of one’s convictions, biases, limitations, and one’s personal intent or goal and expectations when approaching the text, i.e., the personal ‘why.’ Then one states one’s academic goal and the possible contingencies and problems that surround and face one’s project, and one discusses the texts in question and whether there are any difficulties stemming from the texts themselves. With the variables and contingencies out in

the open, especially one's own limitations, there is a degree of honesty, transparency, and humility that is not only good for oneself, but makes clear to the reader that one is aware generally and aware of oneself, exposing oneself with confidence to criticism. However, very few of us are willing and brave enough to wear his heart on his sleeve. Although, even the bravest and most honest among us should be aware that none of us will or can express our whole selves, especially on paper. Nor is each of us aware of our subconscious biases, biases that others can sometimes spot. However, others do not know you as you know yourself, so approach criticism with an open, healthy skepticism and eagerness for dialogue. One is then prepared to proceed with one's project.

1.10 Methodological Considerations

To avoid droning on about myself, let me succinctly state my convictions, my consequent biases, and limitations. I am not a strict adherent to any philosophic or methodological school. Of first principles, I am convinced that knowledge of things is possible. This means I am convinced that there are truths and falsehoods, that some things are true, others false, and that we can know truths and the truth in some way. For instance, my existence is apodictically certain to me. I know I exist, and I know that my existence at the time I think about my existence or my thinking is true. I cannot deny my thinking when I am thinking about my thinking, and while I am thinking about thinking I become aware of the apodictic certainty of my thinking, and I thus know that I must exist. For my denial of my own thinking is an act of thought, and my thought must be the act of a thinking and existing thing. In a similar vein, I know that the three laws of classical laws of thought are formalizations of transcendental truths.²⁸ They are transcendental not solely because they are the foundation of logic (since any affirmation or denial presupposes them, which includes any affirmation or denial of said axioms), but transcendental because they share a relationship so intimate with being that any manifestation of being expresses the axioms or they bind any expression of being or non-being, hypothetical or non-hypothetical.²⁹ We thus might infer that I am partial in some ways to the philosophy of Descartes and Aristotle.

Next let me express my biases, abilities, and shortcomings, though I cannot provide a comprehensive and altogether unbiased account of myself. Throughout my university education, all my mentors have been conservative thinkers with the exception of two or three.

²⁸ $\neg(A \wedge \neg A)$, $(A=A)$, $(A \vee \neg A)$.

²⁹ The essence of axioms is an upcoming project of mine.

Consequently, most of my education in philosophy has been an approach to the Greeks, Romans, Medievals, Moderns, and Contemporaries through a conservative lens. While my own political leaning is pragmatic, one might be inclined to say that, because of my education, I am sympathetic toward reactionary, traditionalist, and conservative thought. This is not necessarily false. However, I do not align myself exclusively with any specific political or philosophic camp, though I have what some might consider conservative tendencies.

My limitations do not end there. I can say with honesty that I do not consider myself terribly knowledgeable. The early years of my life, particularly those most vital in the education of a young man, were squandered in the engagement of countless trivialities. As consequence, I am not terribly well-read in literature or poetry; I have meager knowledge of the Greek or Latin language with the exception of a few key terms; I have sparse knowledge of the canon and an even sparser knowledge of history outside of a few eras. My memory and philosophic ability is wanting. By nature, I am rash, quarrelsome, bold, and uncouth, in constant need of the bridle of moderation and the lash of discipline. Although, I attribute a deal of these qualities to my own individual nature and decisions, I recognize that they are in part due to my biological disposition and age, in part due to the formless spirit of the times. Regarding my virtues, they are, if any, my boldness, candor, and willingness to argue and discuss with anyone about anything. My personal intent, to be clear, is to develop as a scholar, my immediate goal to procure a Master's degree.

By this point, it should be clear that I am aware of the various difficulties and epistemological issues surrounding a textual approach to Plato's philosophy by means of the dialogues. I am aware of the subjective and objective issues surrounding Platonic studies. There is no sense repeating myself again on these matters. My scholarly intent is making others aware of the issues surrounding Platonic studies. The central goal of my project, and the central goal of any method, must be truth in some way. All other goals are secondary to this chief goal. My specific goal is to react to the issues I outline in the preceding discussion by demonstrating a way of thinking, reading, and speaking about Plato and his dialogues, a mindset, that avoids the pitfalls of the burden of proof that bogs down other Platonic scholarship.

My analyses of method and Platonic texts lead me to awareness of the limitations to Platonic studies. The conclusion of my analyses, therefore, leads me to suggest a metamethodological approach to Plato and philosophy more generally, eclecticism. The best method to approach Plato's dialogues and philosophy, as I see it, is a synthesis of exegesis and

hermeneutics that result in a dialogical, speculative, philosophic commentary. This commentary draws from the vast expertise of others, adopting what is most persuasive in a given case, while constantly maintaining a self-awareness of the limitations of finite human knowledge, the possibility for eisegesis, and the overall difficulties surrounding Plato's enigmatic dialogues, always before the mind. To quote John M. Cooper, to whom I am sympathetic, "the truth must be arrived at by each of us for ourselves, in a cooperative search, and Plato is only inviting others to do their own intellectual work, in cooperation with him, in thinking through the issues that he is addressing."³⁰ The project at hand is an investigation the concept of ἔρως in the first six speeches in Plato's *Symposium*. Then from the exegesis of these six encomiums, we engage in phenomenology of eros and reflect on its metaphysical underpinnings in relation to politics.

1.11 The Texts

As I outline in my introduction, in this thesis I focus on eros in *Symposium*. However, I do not limit myself to *Symposium* exclusively. I think the dialogues are a form of play, the Platonic corpus being a large conversation. Thus, I see no reason why we cannot jump around to dialogues such as *Euthydemus*, *Euthyphro*, *Philebus*, or *Meno* for examples. Further, I refine my interpretation of eros and *Symposium* by engaging with a variety of secondary sources. However, let me say that I by no means try to offer an exhaustive account of eros as a concept in this project. I rely on Nehemas' translation of *Symposium* among other translations in Cooper's *Collected Works*, and I look to Bernadette and Bury's translations of *Symposium* as well. I also engage with a selection of books and articles from the secondary literature.

I will be approaching this project with the form of eclecticism outlined above, but keeping Straussian and Cambridge School critique in mind. Thus, I have made an effort to acquaint myself with Plato's historical circumstances and philosophical antecedents. For instance, I have read a number of translations of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* along with the works of Hesiod and the works of the Greek poets. I think having a grasp of the epic poems and Greek mythology is important because on the one hand, poetry is reflective of the ideals or popular understandings of a people in an age, and on the other hand, it is a collection of symbols through which a people can communicate. High poetry is so successful because people can sympathize with the content and celebrate the presentation of the poet's words. One could also

³⁰ Plato, *Complete Works*, xx.

say that the popularity of particular poets reflects something not only in the poet, but also about the audience. In addition, it is sometimes the case that poetry communicates the experience of reality in a way philosophy cannot.

Of Plato's other philosophical antecedents, the Presocratic philosophers, I restrict my research to the fragments of Parmenides, Heraclitus, and Empedocles. I have chosen these three because their works are complimentary with regards to the conflicting ontologies of motion and rest. I will admit that I am by no means an expert of Presocratic philosophy, and I have done little more than engage briefly with the primary sources included in Daniel W. Graham's excellent sourcebook, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy: The Complete Fragments and Selected Testimonies of the Major Presocratics*.

Chapter 2: Five Lovers, Five Speeches

2.1 Introduction

We now apply our eclectic method to Plato's dialogues and to the rich discourse in Platonic studies. Our topic of interest is the nature of eros as presented in *Symposium*. A study of the Platonic presentation of eros is beyond a thesis, for a study of eros is the basis for an entire academic career and the basis for a kind of philosophic life. Necessarily, my account of eros will be lacking. For the purposes of this project, I profess to present no more than a mere phantom of eros. Thus I ask the reader to pardon my candid and frank speech about love in many places and my failure to flesh out all of the ideas fully, and I extend an invitation to unravel together the mysteries of love.

If our investigation is of eros, we cannot begin with a definition of love. To begin with a definition in question is akin to beginning at the end. Thus, let us begin by shifting between dialogues to form a general, bare-bones outline of eros. Then, let us proceed by turning our gaze to *Symposium* and rooting our discussion of eros within a close reading of the first six speeches of the dialogue to fill out our conception of love. From there, we will have enough information before us to reflect and engage in phenomenology of love for the purposes of considering eros even further and its relationship to human life, privately and publicly. In terms of beginning by approaching the dialogues haphazardly, we can approach the dialogues in this way because there is nothing preventing our reading the dialogues as closed conversations within a grand conversation outside of space and time.³¹ One can read the dialogues in a linear fashion, but it is not at all necessary, for there is seemingly a variety of different weaving paths that open up discourse on eros, and perhaps on the nature of being as well. However, perhaps we will find that

³¹ While there is little concrete evidence for a chronology of the dialogues, many divide and order the dialogues according to the developmental thesis. This reading of Plato groups the dialogues into rough orderings of 'early,' 'middle,' and 'late'. The basis for this grouping relies heavily on an interpretive thesis. The interpretive thesis posits that there is a distinct development of Plato's thought, writing style, and philosophical focus from the early, to middle, and then later periods of his life. In a phrase, the developmental thesis posits that we can trace the chronology of the dialogues according to the 'maturation' of the philosophical topics presented in the dialogue, as they *should* coincide with Plato's maturation. As it stands, however, the developmentalist thesis is little more than a hope posing as historical fact. The developmental thesis is wishful thinking—plausible, but not terribly compelling, factually or otherwise. For while it is a fact that Plato's thoughts necessarily developed with age, it is altogether plausible that Plato may have written the dialogues in a disarranged order, playing with ideas in one dialogue while fleshing out those same ideas in another, thereby making an authentic chronology impossible and the developmentalist thesis a Gordian Knot to untangle. Instead, I prefer to read the Platonic corpus, not as a set of dictates of philosophical doctrine, not as a chronological or dramatic storybook, but as a conversation.

eros, like Plato, or rather Plato like eros, is oil-like, cunning, elusive, and intimate, close at hand yet in some sense beyond grasp.

2.2 The Groundwork of Eros

Plato never seems to give an unequivocal definition of what Love itself is. Like Justice in *Republic*, we never hear Eros “extolled all by itself” (R. 358d). Again, like Justice in *Republic*, Plato presents a number of *images* of Eros itself, descriptions in analogous or partial terms, a “sketch” or “kind of phantom” either in the form of myth or man (R. 443c, 504d–e).³² Although Socrates claims possession of a “god-given ability to tell pretty quickly when someone is in love and who he’s in love with” at *Lysis* 204b–c, and again at *Symposium* 177e that the only thing he claims to understand is “the art of love,” Socrates never professes to know what Love itself is. This may be why the accounts of love that are present in the dialogues never leave the domain of description and analogy. With this assertion that the dialogues’ accounts of love are always either descriptive or analogous, I am trying to convey two things. First, that any account or definition of love put forth in the dialogues is too narrow, too broad, or a mythological image that fails to capture what we mean when we say ‘Love.’ Second, any account of Love, just as any account of an Idea, is bound to symbolic language of the empirical within the empirical while aiming at the transcendental. Again, what Plato gives us is a great plurality of *images* of Love—those things we take to be its qualities as reflected in nature and human experience, a great variety of lovers and things loved, and the characteristics we divine through processes of reflection and abstraction reasoning.³³

Despite Plato never telling us directly what Eros itself is, he does point us in the direction of what it might be. He begins, as is natural, with the human things; what he has Socrates tell us about love first and foremost is that, “as everyone plainly knows, love is some kind of desire” (Phdr. 237d).³⁴ It would seem that everyone *plainly* knows that love is a kind of desire because nearly everyone experiences the want accompanying erotic longing.

³² Zuckert, *Philosophers*, 298, 302, 313, 318.

³³ Zuckert, *Philosophers*, 320.

³⁴ Although a minor point, Wedgwood seems to have this taxonomy reversed, that love is the genus and desire is the species, though the text would suggest otherwise. See Ralph Wedgwood, “Diotima’s Eudaemonism: Intrinsic Value and Rational Motivation in Plato’s *Symposium*,” *Phronesis* vol. 54, no. 4/5, (2009), 307. For the importance of classification in Platonic philosophy, see Deborah De Chiara-Quenzer, “*A Method for Pleasure and Reason: Plato’s Philebus*,” *Apeiron*, vol. 26, no. 1 (1993), 48–43.

Next, Plato has Socrates say at *Philebus* 35c–d that “desire is not a matter of the body,” but that “the rule of the whole animal is the domain of the soul.” Therefore, if we are to assume that love is a kind of desire, we infer that love, like desire, is governed by the soul, and that love includes, but is more than, higher than, mere erotic appetitive energy. While Plato does describe desire as the simple “filling and emptying and all such processes,” the dialogues suggest that desire is the soul’s detection of the presence of an absence—an emptiness—and the soul’s subsequent urge to fill that emptiness, for “a thing that desires desires something of which it is in need” (Phlb. 35b–c; Smp. 200b).

This statement at *Symposium* 200b expresses quite nicely two fundamental distinctions about desire: First, it distinguishes between the subject and the object. Second, it distinguishes the subject as the desiring thing and the object as the thing desired, which is another way of saying that the desiring subject is the thing *lacking* and that the desired object is the thing *lacked*. Therefore, desire first assumes the distinction between both subject and object, *and* the presence of a lack in the subject and a perceived object of lack. Now, we can infer that a lack is a kind of deprivation. Plato suggests at *Philebus* 47c–d that deprivation itself is painful. We have granted that love is a kind of desire, and that Plato designates both to the domain of the soul. It follows that if desire stems from a kind of lacking, and that lacking is a form of deprivation, then we can infer that desire presupposes deprivation.³⁵ Further, it follows that, if we have a desire, then we have a deprivation; and if we have a deprivation, then we feel pain. Ergo, if we have a desire, then we feel pain, or put more simply, desire is painful.³⁶ In other words, the source of desire and pain is the same: the lack. We can thus conclude that, because love is a kind of desire, and because desire is painful, then love, too, is painful; and since both love and desire fall within the domain of the soul, love stems from a pain of the soul—it is a longing to heal this pain.³⁷ This sheds some light on the axiom that “love is a lack,” and enables us to sympathize with Plato’s Socrates when he suggests that love is “a kind of pain within the soul itself” (Phlb. 47e).³⁸

This acknowledgement of love as a lack brings us to our next question: What is it that the lover lacks that his soul so painfully longs for? Plato suggests, and thereby recognizes, a plurality

³⁵ $P \rightarrow Q, P \vdash Q$

³⁶ $P \rightarrow Q, Q \rightarrow R \vdash P \rightarrow R$

³⁷ Consider Aristophanes’ speech at *Symposium* 191d, where he describes love as the drive to heal the wound of human nature. Also consider Waller R. Newell, *Ruling Passion: The Erotics of Statecraft in Platonic Political Philosophy*, (New York: Roman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.), 74.

³⁸ For an excellent and thought provoking analysis on the nature of pain in Platonic psychology, especially within the notoriously difficult *Philebus*, see Matthew Evans, “Plato and the Meaning of Pain,” *Apeiron*, (2007), 71–94.

of things within the manifold of experience that can be the object of one's love. For instance, we talk about lovers of money, lovers of sex, lovers of animals, or lovers of wisdom, a great variety of lovers and a great variety of things loved.³⁹ Further, we recognize a problem of boundaries, as the boundaries of an individual's love can be broad or narrow.⁴⁰ To illustrate with an example, while one lover of animals loves all animals, the whole of Animalia, another might be the lover of a part within the whole of Animalia, a genus such as mammals. Likewise, we could have a lover that only loves a species within the genus mammal, such as dogs, and a lover of a particular breed within that species, or a lover of a particular dog within that breed, and so forth. In other words, we can recognize that there is a hierarchy of love, a distinction between a love of the particular, a love of the parts of a whole, and the love of the whole itself. This distinction between love of the parts and love of the whole seems to be what Socrates is alluding to at *Symposium* 204b–c, and I would ask the reader to keep this distinction in mind.

Plato might suggest that we analyze human conduct more generally for an answer to the lover's dilemma. At *Gorgias* 468b–c, Socrates tells us that we do everything we do “because we pursue what is good,” and we want to do these things “if they are beneficial, but if they're harmful we don't.” For “everyone, after all, desires good things” (R. 438a). In other words, nobody willingly pursues bad things for themselves, but only those things that we believe are good. Moreover, if we pursue or do something that is bad and harmful for our constitution, we are acting out of ignorance and animal stupidity; we are, in some regard, ‘unaware’ of what we are doing when we act badly. This thesis is reaffirmed at *Protagoras* 345e, when Socrates claims that nobody ever “willingly does anything wrong or badly.”⁴¹ But this position that no one pursues the bad willingly invites a question: Why do we pursue good things?

The answer to the question of why we desire good things is perhaps conspicuous: We desire good things both because they are beneficial and because they make us happy.⁴² We might say that people desire things they *perceive* as beneficial, valuable, and beautiful, and they desire these things because they *perceive* them to be good (Smp. 205e–206a). Therefore, by virtue of

³⁹ Zuckert, *Philosophers*, 320.

⁴⁰ Consider Socrates' love of Philosophy, Alcibiades, and his love of conversing with handsome and insightful young men more generally.

⁴¹ This also stands as an answer to the problem of the craft analogy in *Hippias Minor*.

⁴² Or perhaps what we are engaging in with Plato and Socrates is an endeavor to discover what people mean when they use the word, “good.” Perhaps a thing is good insofar as it has some aspect of desirability. Simply put, the good is that which is desired. Or perhaps good is that which should be desired.

these impressions, man pursues what he believes to be good things. And when man has good things, when he possesses them, uses them well, and makes them his own, he will have happiness and be happy. Therefore, people desire and pursue what is good in order to be happy, and happiness is an end in itself, the end of all life (Smp. 204e–205a).

All things pursue what is good. Socrates eloquently expresses this truth at *Philebus* 20d. He says,

Now, this point, I take it, is most necessary to assert of the good: that everything that has any notion of it hunts for it and desires to get hold of it and secure it for its own, caring nothing for anything else except for what is connected with the acquisition of some good.

Humans are particularly desirous animals. That which we desire is the acquisition of some good. Since we desire good things, and because love is a kind of desire, we love good things. Since we desire and pursue good things because we believe they will make us happy, so too do we love good things and pursue them because we believe they will make us happy. But one can make a distinction even more fundamental than that. We do not just love good ‘things.’ We love what is good simply because it is good—we seek things by virtue of their quality of goodness. Thus, we seek good for ourselves more generally, or so it would seem. The inference follows that love is in a broader sense an erotic (but not exclusively sexual) longing of the soul both for what is good and for happiness.⁴³

Advancing our pursuit of eros (for we have thus far only a very general sketch), I would like to proceed by grounding our discussion in *Symposium*.⁴⁴ I wish to do two things in this section. First, I wish to fill out the vague framework of eros developed thus far with a heartier image of what eros might be with regards to its scope, content, and nature. I plan to achieve this goal by engaging in exegetical analysis of the dialogue’s first six speeches. Second, alongside the exegetical process of developing a richer image of eros, I re-present a reading and commentary of the major argument or arguments that are present within the speeches. This is not to say that my own interpretation of the speeches or dialogue is by any means the best reflection Plato’s actual thought. I am not an authority on Plato. Instead, my analysis provides but tentative answers to some problems of philosophic and political life, and I seek to facilitate further

⁴³ This poses a serious philosophic problem, which we come to in Chapter 4.

⁴⁴ Though I have dipped lightly into the dialogue already.

consideration and discussion about Plato's erotic dialogue, for, as Alexander Nehamas rightly puts it, "the *Symposium* has proved inexhaustible."⁴⁵

2.3 A Memory of a Memory

There are many ways to read the speeches of *Symposium*. Some scholars place more weight on dramatic setting, others on the weight and validity of the spoken arguments presented within each speech. Interpretation therefore relies to some degree on the weight one gives to certain variables. One who believes dramatic setting and what goes unsaid or unsolved in a dialogue possess more gravity than the spoken or allegorical argument will necessarily interpret the text differently than one who does the exact opposite. How one justifies the legitimacy of emphasis and what one emphasizes in a text will necessarily influence the outcome of one's interpretation. Both approaches to the text are in some sense legitimate since we lack of Archimedean point, and perhaps a synthesis of the manifold of textual interpretations would be a worthwhile project that paints a beautiful picture. However, there is logically only *one* true interpretation of Plato's texts, his own interpretation, and there is little indication as to what he wishes to emphasize. For these reasons, I do not regard my own reading of the speeches in *Symposium* or my reading of any of the dialogues as authoritative, and I have chosen to think and write about Plato's philosophy in a speculative manner.

Many of my good friends, colleagues, and mentors make a convincing case that the dramatic setting of a dialogue indubitably influences its content. I find this ironically quasi-historicist argument persuasive for the following reason: The dramatic setting is part of the written content of the dialogue, i.e., the dramatic setting is part of the presentation of the argument or arguments. Subsequently, the dramatic setting of *Symposium* would seem to influence Plato's presentation of eros within the dialogue. However, to engage in a complete exegetical analysis of the dialogue's arguments, which include its dramatic setting, is simply beyond the scope of this project. One need only consider the layers upon layers of meaning one can ascertain from the dramatic setting, and how the setting is so open to interpretation that it proves very difficult to distinguish intent of the author within any reasonable margin. For this reason, I choose to focus on the speeches within *Symposium*, for they are, at least to some

⁴⁵ See Alexander Nehamas, "'Only in the Contemplation of Beauty is Human Life Worth Living' Plato, *Symposium* 211d," *European Journal of Philosophy* vol. 15, no. 1 (2007), 14.

degree, contained individual accounts of eros that can be understood with respect to themselves or to the dialogue as a whole. Although I do make some effort to consider dynamics in relation to the speeches, I apologize to the reader for the imperfection of this project.

Before diving into the speeches, there is one point of setting that I wish to call to the reader's attention. There is much to be said about the buildup before the speeches—Aristodemus' attendance to the party without an invite, i.e., his *gatecrashing* and his uncanny resemblance to Socrates' depiction of eros; Socrates' moments of deep reflection on the neighbour's porch; the overall setting of a hyper-masculine drinking party and the implications that such an environment might have on the encomiums of love, and so on. However, what I wish to draw attention to is the role of memory in the dialogue. Apollodorus, the narrative voice of the dialogue, begins by recalling for an unnamed friend, a "rich businessman" (Smp. 173c), the events of the drinking party at Agathon's manor, a second round celebration the day after Agathon's victory in dramatic competition with his first tragedy (173a). Apollodorus himself did not attend the festivities, for he was still a child (173a). He learned of the events from Aristodemus (174a), and he proceeds to recount the night of festivities and the speeches on Love as Aristodemus had told him for the stranger. However, Apollodorus informs us that "Aristodemus couldn't remember exactly what everyone said, and I myself don't remember everything he told me" (178a). What I wish to make clear is that all of *Symposium*, except for some brief dialogue, is framed as a memory of a memory—Apollodorus' recollection of Aristodemus' memory—and that a shroud of uncertainty cloaks *Symposium* in a way that might encourage us to question whether Plato is not treating the topic at hand, Love, speculatively.

2.4 Phaedrus: An Honest or Fickle Lover?

Phaedrus' speech looks to be composed of three distinct parts.⁴⁶ He begins with a theogony, discussing the genesis of Love. According to Phaedrus, we honor Love because he is one of the most ancient gods, for "the parents of Love have no place in poetry or legend" (178b).⁴⁷ And Phaedrus seems to be telling the truth. He cites Hesiod, Parmenides, and Acusilaus to prove his point. Hesiod writes in *Theogony* that Eros, "who is the most beautiful among the gods, the limb-

⁴⁶ Alessandra Fussi, "The Desire for Recognition in Plato's *Symposium*," *Arethusa*, vol. 41, no. 2 (2008), 239.

⁴⁷ Jordi Pàmias, among many other scholars, notices that Phaedrus is being rash with this statement. Pàmias makes a convincing argument that there are varieties of early poetic and philosophic traditions that discuss the parentage of Eros. See Jordi Pàmias, "Phaedrus' Cosmology in the Symposium," *Classical Quarterly* vol. 62 no. 2 (2012), 533, and see 533 n.1 and n.2 for an extended bibliography on the matter.

melter—he [who] overpowers the mind and the thoughtful counsel of all the gods and of all human beings in their breasts,” comes into being after Chasm, Earth, and Tartarus, Love being one of the first ancestors of all the gods (178b).⁴⁸ Parmenides says “First of all the gods she devised Eros,” the fragment possibly suggesting that Eros was first of the gods to come into existence (178b).⁴⁹ Both of these authorities seem to suggest loosely that Love is without parentage.⁵⁰

Now, Phaedrus appeals to Acusilaus of Argos as an authority to justify his *logos* about Eros. This appeal creates a problem. On the one hand, the inclusion of Acusilaus in Phaedrus’ speech might be a corruption of the text.⁵¹ On the other hand, there is evidence that suggests Acusilaus’ cosmology has Eros born of Erebus⁵² (nether darkness) and Night, which not only undermines Phaedrus’ argument that Eros is without parents, but also conveys to the reader Acusilaus’ cosmogonic thought. Acusilaus does not “envisage a world where Eros leaves his seed; instead, he conceives a frightening cosmos where all of the gods derive from nocturnal and abyssal chasms.”⁵³ Regardless, these alternatives call Phaedrus’ cosmology into question, and one proposed solution to reintroduce coherence to Phaedrus’ cosmology is to read 171b in a different light. Rather than read 171b as arguing that Love as one of the “most ancient gods” and that “the parents of Love have no place in poetry or legend,” one can read the passage as saying that Love is one of the “most prominent gods” and that “the offspring of Love have no place in poetry or legend.”⁵⁴ With the alternative reading, Phaedrus’ account of Love is consistent with

⁴⁸ Hesiod, *Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*, trans. Glenn W. Most (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 13. Curiously, Phaedrus does not choose to include the genealogical primacy of Tartarus to Eros in Hesiod’s cosmology.

⁴⁹ See Daniel W. Graham, trans., *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy: The Completed Fragments and Selected Testimonies of the Major Presocratics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 224–225, Fr [F13] (DK 28B13). Note that Phaedrus does not qualify the ‘she’ in Parmenides’ statement, which does suggest a progenitor.

⁵⁰ Lucian, while commenting on the poetry of Hesiod, also suggests that the poet conceived of Love as one of the very first gods among Chasm, Earth, and Sky. See Most, *Testimonia*, 191. Aristotle also comments on Hesiod and Parmenides’ statements about the origins of Eros, and suggests that they might consider Love as a necessary organizing principle of cause and effect. See Most, *Testimonia*, 247; Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 984b23–32. However, Zuckert juxtaposes this conception of eros to that suggested in the Socrates-Diotima speech, that eros as a daimon does not possess the power of generation so much as communication, and that eros does not produce an unending stream of causality so much as bring together opposites. See Zuckert, *Philosophers*, 193.

⁵¹ Pàmias, *Phaedrus*, 534.

⁵² See [http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0057:entry=*\)/erebos](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0057:entry=*)/erebos).

⁵³ Pàmias, *Phaedrus*, 538.

⁵⁴ Pàmias reads *πρεσβύτατον* as “important, higher magnitude” rather than “ancient,” and swaps *γονῆς γὰρ Ἐρωτος* (parents of Love) for *γοναί γὰρ Ἐρωτος* (offspring of Love) following the Stobaeus manuscript. See Pàmias, *Phaedrus*, 538–540, n.24, n.25, n.26, n.27.

his sources. However, this cosmology raises a problem not of parentage, but of progeny—Phaedrus' Eros, a homoerotic Eros, is non-generating.⁵⁵ When Phaedrus proceeds to say at 178c, that “All sides agree, then, that Love is one of the most [prominent] gods. As such, he gives us the greatest goods,” one cannot help but beg the question: What great good can a non-generative force give? Already, Phaedrus presents us with a problem that seems to pervade the discourse of *Symposium*.

Phaedrus then proceeds to the second part of his speech where he seems to focus on the terrestrial role of *eros* as educator in seemingly romantic relationships. As we note above, Phaedrus tells the party and the reader that Eros is the giver of the “greatest goods.” Phaedrus then proceeds to say that he “cannot say what greater good there is for a young boy than a *gentle* lover, or for a lover than a boy to love” (178c).⁵⁶ Though the answer may be intuitive to some of us, we cannot help but ask: What is so great about being in love with someone? According to Phaedrus, we are not talking about any old run-of-the-mill relationship. Instead, the great good that Eros seems to bring is a sophisticated lifelong relationship—Eros births reciprocal, beneficial pederastic relationships founded on honourability and seemliness whose primary root is mutual carnal desire. I am making a distinction here. Phaedrus does not seem to suggest that the mutual state of ‘being in love’ with a good, worthy, and therefore desirable lover *alone* is the great gift Eros bestows. Instead, Phaedrus seems to suggest that the relationship between two

⁵⁵ Pàmias, Phaedrus, 540. One might note that Diotima offers a higher ontological status to homosexual partners, and she does describe this eros as generating (209c–d).

⁵⁶ Emphasis mine; this is the A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff rendering of the passage. R. G. Bury translates the passage quite differently: “I for my part am at a loss to say what greater blessing a man can have in earliest youth than an *honorable* lover, or a lover than an *honorable* favorite” and again the emphasis is mine. What I wish to draw attention to is the word *χρηστός*, which is being translated into the words *gentle* and *honorable* respectively. *χρηστός* is a broad word that captures a variety of ideas. It can mean effective, good, honest, *worthy*, valiant, deserving, trustworthy, revered (but not necessarily), and the term possesses strong moral connotation and suggests the character of a good and admirable citizen. However, the term can also mean useful and effective, even for evil sense. Nevertheless, the terms *gentle* and *honorable* do not necessarily capture what Phaedrus seems to be conveying, though *honorable* seems to do the text more justice. For there seems to be two senses that both lovers are thought to be *honorable*. On the one hand, the *honorable* lover is *honorable* because he is a man of good character—he is trustworthy, honest, loyal, etc., and he acts accordingly. On the other hand, the *honorable* lover is *honorable* because he is worthy of reverence, he is admirable, he is desirable more generally, and thus he is worthy of our love. The word *χρηστός* thus seems to convey the idea of honourability in both a public and private sense; the *honorable* boyfriend is seemingly in his thoughts, actions, and character not only privately but also publicly, and thus he is worth honouring and esteeming more generally. Everyone wants their beloved to be worthy of their love in a substantive way, not only in their own eyes, but also in the eyes of others. However, we must keep in mind the problem of non-generating Eros. Thus far, Phaedrus' account of Eros seems similar to Aristotle's interpretation of the early cosmologists—Eros is a binding principle that brings things together. See [http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=xrhsto%5Cs&la=greek&can=xrhsto%5Cs0&prior=e\)rasth\s&d=Perseus:text:1999.01.0173:text=Sym.:section=178c&i=1#lexicon](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=xrhsto%5Cs&la=greek&can=xrhsto%5Cs0&prior=e)rasth\s&d=Perseus:text:1999.01.0173:text=Sym.:section=178c&i=1#lexicon).

worthy lovers is a great good *also* because of its natural effect, its *mutual educative benefit* in a broad sense, the relationship invigorates, rejuvenates, and preserves the good character and qualities that makes one honourable and desirable in the first place while simultaneously satiating physical longing. The relationship Phaedrus outlines seems to be a great good both intrinsically and instrumentally.

To support this reading with evidence, let us turn to the text. Phaedrus follows up by saying “There is a certain guidance *each person needs for his whole life*, if he is to live well; and nothing imparts this guidance—not high kinship, not public honor, not wealth—nothing imparts this guidance as well as Love” (178c–d).⁵⁷ Not only does Eros give the gift of the relationship, but he also serves a foundational guiding and educational role in the bond—not only does Eros bring lovers together, but he also guides lovers by establishing *boundaries*. The guiding and educational role of Eros is not lopsided, but mutually distributed between lovers, for we all need guidance for our whole lives; guidance is not exclusively for children. Phaedrus suggests that Eros is the best guide because he instills the hearts of both lovers with “a sense of shame at acting shamefully, and a sense of pride in acting well,” because without these, “nothing fine or great can be accomplished, in public or in private” (178d). However, I do not think that Phaedrus is suggesting that Eros is a literal educator, instilling in the lovers an understanding of what is and is not shameful, for that seems to be a matter of nature and convention, at which we will arrive momentarily. Instead, Phaedrus seems to be arguing that Eros instills, alongside the categorical longing for a beloved characteristic of erotic love, the desire to be loved and recognized in return by the beloved *plus* the fear of disappointing the beloved on the one hand, and a sense of pride on the other hand. Let us begin examining the former, how Eros provides the substrate for a shame complex.

Acting well in public or private presupposes conventional expectations and boundaries. Does Eros teach us public and private custom? Not entirely. Eros might instill the sense of shame in the heart of each lover and play a strong educative role, but the lovers themselves must furnish the complex and perpetuate it in each other. Though a sort of chicken-egg scenario, we expect from Phaedrus’ encomium thus far that the kinship of lover and beloved imparts to the young man the knowhow and the model of how to be a good citizen and prepares him for public life,

⁵⁷ Emphasis mine.

presupposing that the mature lover is already a member of the body politic. We suspect that the young man, in turn, keeps the mature man in check, so that he does not jeopardize his own seemliness and virtue. We would like to think that a healthy pederastic relationship guided by Eros cultivates virtue in both parties, especially moderation, and the relationship imparts the seeds of strong morals and civic virtue to the young while maintaining those very same qualities and expectations in the old if the lovers are indeed *χρηστός*.

At first glance, Phaedrus' encomium of Love would seem to be taking an admirable direction thus far, though it might be straying from the path of telling us what Eros itself is. Aside from Phaedrus going astray, his speech raises a serious ethical issue if we were to choose to interpret his words, which are used somewhat ambiguously, in an uncharitable fashion, i.e., Phaedrus is in trouble if we do not give him the benefit of the doubt. From a practical perspective, a shame or guilt complex seems necessary for a well-functioning civil society. This complex suggests an internal mechanism and external criteria to distinguish ugly actions from the beautiful.⁵⁸ Phaedrus seems to recognize that such a sense of shame and criteria for good and bad conduct are necessary for a seemingly and therefore beneficial mutual relationship both publicly and privately, otherwise there can be no great accomplishments because there are no boundaries or criteria for good and bad action. Although Phaedrus cares for great accomplishments publicly and privately, which tacitly presupposes a care for convention, Phaedrus' supposed concern for convention and genuine noble conduct is questionable. Consider the following:

What I say is this: if a man in love is found doing something shameful, or accepting shameful treatment because he is a coward and makes no defense, then nothing would give him more *pain* than being seen by the boy he loves—*not even being seen by his father or his comrades*. We see the same thing also in the boy he loves, that he is especially ashamed before his lover when he is caught in something shameful (178d–e).⁵⁹

Let us consider what Phaedrus does say and does not say about shame. Phaedrus does not explicitly say that lovers feel shame, or that anyone feels shame, simply by virtue of having acted shamefully. What would seem to be a commonsensical idea Phaedrus leaves ambiguous: that some actions are frankly bad and that one should feel shame simply by virtue of committing a

⁵⁸ Paul Groarke discusses something along these lines with regards to the legal dimensions of a society. See Paul Groarke, *Legal Theories: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy of Law*, (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2013), 13–22.

⁵⁹ Emphasis mine.

shameful act. Instead, Phaedrus' posturing seems to suggest that lovers, or any others, feel shame predominantly when they perceive that their peers are perceiving them to be acting shamefully, and that this is especially true when their beloved perceives them as acting in a shameful manner. That others recognize an action to be cause for admonishing gives rise to the feeling of shame in the acting agent, the lover. The feeling of shame seems to be a kind of pain, a pain that the lover by all means tries to avoid.

When I say that Phaedrus' concern for convention and genuine noble conduct is questionable, what I mean is that Phaedrus does not seem so concerned about the problem of doing shameful things and acting shamefully, but the problems associated with one's being regarded, judged, viewed, or thought of as doing shameful things and acting shamefully. In other words, Phaedrus' concern seems not to be a serious question of virtue. Instead, his concern seems to be a question of optics and public perception. If Phaedrus cares more about image than genuine considerations of good and bad courses of action, we could infer that he does not care about morality or ethics. For example, there is no reason to believe that Phaedrus cares if a lover or beloved does something vile out of sight, so long as nobody perceives it, especially so long as one's romantic partner fails to perceive it. So long as the lover and beloved continue to conceive of each other in a favorable light, there does not seem to be a problem for Phaedrus in secret shameful acts perceived only by the acting agent.

To push this line of reasoning further, if a lover or beloved acts heinously, and if the lover or beloved does not believe, perceive, or judge the conduct to be shameful or bad, regardless of what it is, then there does not seem to be a reason for the shameful agent to care about his shameful conduct at all. On the one hand, this enquiry highlights how χρηστός can mean good, effective, or useful in an *amoral* sense. On the other hand, my enquiry suggests that, for Phaedrus, conventional virtue and seemliness might simply amount to optics, which points to the arguments of Glaucon, Adeimantus, and Thrasymachus in *Republic*. From my own vantage point, surely Love as an educator does not teach such shallow lessons.

Even if we give Phaedrus the benefit of the doubt, that Love instills a sense of shame and pride in both lovers so that they can achieve great accomplishments publicly and privately, which tacitly presupposes a care for convention, Phaedrus' description of the relationship between lovers conveys a sort of atomism. I say that Phaedrus' account of the relationship

between lovers is atomistic because it would seem that the admiration and love of the beloved holds precedence over all for both respective lovers, including family, friends, and convention at large (176e). Again, the root of this problem seems to be the predominance of recognition in Phaedrus' account of love. The world of the lover seems to gravitate around the recognition, admiration, and desire of the beloved, and vice versa. Perhaps the saving grace to this reading of Phaedrus' account of love is the "sense of pride in acting well" and "ambition for what is noble" that he claims Eros instills in lovers (178d), a natural pride and desire for nobility that keeps one away from shameful activity, and encourages upholding convention. However, if one takes pride in one's shabby behaviour, then pride in acting 'well' is not much of a guiding principle.

Let us return to the text of *Symposium* to qualify these interpretations. On the one hand, the charitable reading suggests that Phaedrus advocates a healthy pederastic relationship that cultivates virtue in both parties, especially moderation, and that the relationship imparts the seeds of strong morals and civic virtue to the young while maintaining those very qualities in the mature lover. On the other hand, the cynical reading portrays Phaedrus' lovers as atomized, narcissistic egoists each with no concern for anything other than the reciprocated love and admiration of their own beloved. Let us consider what Phaedrus says from 178e–179a:

If only there were a way to start a city or an army made up of lovers and the boys they love! Theirs would be the best possible system of society, for they would hold back from all that is shameful, and seek honor and glory in each other's eyes. Even a few of them, in battle side by side, would conquer the world, I'd say. For a man in love would never allow his loved one, of all people, to see him leaving ranks or dropping weapons. He'd rather die a thousand deaths!

A city composed of self-centered egoists with little to no concern for convention is unlikely to achieve anything of substantial lasting value. A city of or army of atomistic couples with no overarching concern, desire, or care would amount to little more than a gang of lecherous thieves, a ragtag team of gay outlaws. From the cynical reading, we certainly do not form an image of "the best possible society," and it is difficult to envision a swath of fawning, passion-struck Romeos and Juliets conquering the world, because their respective beloveds *are* their world. Alternatively, from the perspective of the charitable reading, we can envision a city and army of noble lovers and beloveds holding back from what is shameful, and we can envision this city being a potential model for the best possible city, a noble city with not-so-subtle

laconophilic overtones. However, the cynical reading is still a live option, for these lovers “seek honor and glory in each other’s eyes” and he would never want anyone to “see him leaving rank or dropping weapons,” preferring death. The lovers seek recognition and emphasize optics, and again we return to the troublesome ethical questions we discuss above, questions of whether or not Phaedrus and his lovers genuinely care about *being* virtuous and honourable or merely desire its image and reward.

Continuing our evaluation of these two potential readings, let us now transition into the third part of Phaedrus’ speech, examples of heroism and noble lovers guided by Eros. To prove the strength of the bonds of Love, and in an illustration of Love’s power, Phaedrus makes the surprising claim that “no one is so base that Love could not inspire him with courage, and make him feel as brave as if he’d been born a hero,” which is “Love’s [true] gift to every lover” (179a–b). While we return to this idea later in the thesis (the idea that eros inspires courage), let us consider the role of courage in relation to eros in Phaedrus’ encomium on Love, keeping the two potential readings in mind as we go along.

Phaedrus examines three pairs of lovers to illustrate the power of Eros, its binding power and ability to compel others to noble deeds. Phaedrus tries to cash out his argument by drawing from three examples. First, he looks to the love of Alcestis for her husband Admetus, thereby subtly bridging his model of ideal love from homosexual relationships to heterosexual relationships more generally. Alcestis’ love and loyalty to Admetus was so great that it inspired her to forfeit her life to save that of her beloved, and as result the gods rewarded her with new life and the “highest honors” for her “eager courage” (179d). Phaedrus then provides a counter example. Orpheus, unlike Alcestis, did not will to give up his life to save his beloved Eurydice. Instead, Orpheus—apparently lacking the guidance of Love and the “eager courage” he instills—was unwilling to exchange his own life to save that of his beloved, and he thus contrived a clever plot to charm and outsmart Hades. Orpheus’ plans failed, and the Maenads tore him asunder, dishonour being Orpheus’ just reward from the gods for softness and cowardice in the face of love (179d). However, judging from the myth, Orpheus genuinely seems to love Eurydice, or, at the very least, Eurydice feels as though Orpheus genuinely loves her, in the eyes of Ovid anyway, though this is certainly a later interpretation.⁶⁰ Furthermore, how can Phaedrus claim at

⁶⁰ Ovid, *Metamorphoses IX–XV*, trans. Frank Justus Miller (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 69.

179a–b, that nobody can be so base that Love cannot inspire him with courage, if Orpheus is clearly an example where it does not apply? Not only does Phaedrus' condemnation of Orpheus raise problems for his own speech about Love, but his condemnation of Orpheus also raises problems for the dialogue more generally.⁶¹

Phaedrus then moves to Achilles and Patroclus. With the example of Achilles, we see Phaedrus really begin to transition away from the good things that Eros instills in the hearts of men and women and transition toward the rewards that Eros can bring us. Phaedrus begins by alerting the party about the great reward Achilles obtained from the gods, "They sent him to the Isles of the Blest because he dared to stand by his lover Patroclus and defend him," a "special honor, because he made so much of his lover" (179e–180a). Phaedrus contends that Achilles chose to die for Patroclus, suggesting selflessness akin to Alcestis; however, Achilles might have chosen to pursue his destiny of eternal fame for entirely selfish reasons—his mother told him his options—selfishness being a trait not altogether alien to Achilles' character.

Whether or not Achilles is a petulant manchild and whether or not the world of Homeric myth is a world of fate or destiny is not the problem at hand. What matters is distinguishing which of the two readings, the charitable or the cynical, leans closer toward the truth of Phaedrus' speech, which consequently reveals something about Phaedrus' account of Love and informs us about the nature of eros more generally. While Phaedrus began by focusing on the bond that Love established between lovers, to exhibit the bond he looks to the courage that Love breathes into a heart, spurring noble action; there seems to be a strong tendency throughout all three of Phaedrus' examples to gravitate towards optics, recognition, and reward and thus the cynical reading. In the case of Alcestis, "eager courage of love wins highest honors from the gods" (179d); in the case of Orpheus, a lack of courage and selflessness on behalf of Love leads to dishonor and shame (179d–e); in the case of Achilles, the emphasis altogether seems to be on

⁶¹ Orpheus was a devoted follower of Dionysus, and adept in magic, a marvelous musician capable of manipulating causality, and he was versed in all things to do with wisdom. He was also the originator of homosexual passion, for he shunned the love of womankind upon Eurydice's death. Phaedrus' criticism is thus in a sense ironic. Phaedrus, a gay man that orates about the blessings of Love in relation to homosexuality and pederasty, praises the nobility of love in heterosexual relationships (Alcestis and Admetus) and proceeds to criticize an ardent follower of Dionysus and the patron of homosexuality, Orpheus, all in the setting of a celebration of Dionysus with strong homosexual tones, the symposium itself. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 69, 71; Ovid, *The Art of Love and Other Poems*, trans. J. H. Mozley (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 141; H.J. Rose, *A Handbook of Greek Mythology*, (New York: Routledge, 1989), 254–255; and Edith Hamilton, *Mythology*, (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2013), 137.

special honour and privilege (179e–180a). As Phaedrus concludes his speech the discussion shifts altogether from the relationship of eros, seemliness, and virtue to love’s reward—honour and privileges from the gods. Phaedrus tells the party, “[T]he gods honor virtue most highly when it belongs to Love;” they are more generous to beloveds who cherish their lover, hence why Achilles has a higher honour and reward than Alcestis (180b).⁶² Perhaps Phaedrus’ own personality as an honour-seeker, lover of recognition, and beloved is eclipsing his encomium on Love.

Phaedrus proceeds to summarize what he understands his argument to be; “Therefore I say Love is the most ancient [important] of gods, the most honored, and the most powerful in helping men gain virtue and blessedness, whether they are alive or have passed away” (180b).⁶³ Concerning his last assertion, Phaedrus seems to present Eros as a facilitator, a means to virtue and blessedness. Now, perhaps I am a naïve and more of a Christian than I would ever be willing to admit, for I am of the conviction that virtue itself is also a means to happiness and that virtue itself is something of value and beauty. Regardless, what can we infer about Phaedrus’ understanding of love, and which interpretation ought we lean toward?

I lean toward a combination of the two readings. Phaedrus seems to be a man caught between two lines of reasoning. Phaedrus does seem concerned about convention, virtue, noble love, though he by nature salivates at the thought of decoration, laurels, legacy, and, in a word, glory. At best, Phaedrus presents love as a means to authentic virtue and seemliness, a means to and engine of a model relationship whereby public expectation and private relation can both flourish. In its best light, his model of love would seem to promote the cultivation and perpetuation of convention, which is essential for the survival of any noble culture or society.⁶⁴ Such a model aims to foster values and boundaries that promote public and private decency through erotic sublimation, primarily the virtues of moderation, seemliness, and courage,

⁶² Phaedrus seems to have an obsession with recognition, and he recognizes that we are remembered for noble deeds just as well as ignoble.

⁶³ Nehamas translates εὐδαιμονίας as blessedness here. While he who possesses εὐδαιμονίας is indeed blessed, the word has a much broader scope, our English equivalent of good fortune, prosperity, weal, wealth, *true happiness*, opulence, and so on. See [http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?1=eu%29daimoni%2Fas&la=greek&can=eu%29daimoni%2Fas0&prior=kai\&d=Perseus:text:1999.01.0173:text=Sym.:section=180b&i=1#Perseus:text:1999.04.0057:entry=eu\)daimoni/a-contents](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?1=eu%29daimoni%2Fas&la=greek&can=eu%29daimoni%2Fas0&prior=kai\&d=Perseus:text:1999.01.0173:text=Sym.:section=180b&i=1#Perseus:text:1999.04.0057:entry=eu)daimoni/a-contents).

⁶⁴ See Alessandra Fussi, “The Desire for Recognition in Plato’s *Symposium*,” *Arethusa*, vol. 41, no. 2 (2008), 247 for a similar reading.

inherently beautiful qualities of character that spark great deeds that reap great reward and admiration, thereby satiating the desires of Phaedrus' thumotic heart.⁶⁵

Phrased differently, a charitable reading of Phaedrus' model of love seems to advocate the channelling of erotic energy through the lens of moderation for the good and happiness of the individual and the community. However, this is not to say that Phaedrus is advocating a sort of selfless Christian asceticism or the sexual repression of the padlocked chastity belt variety. Rather, a charitable reading of Phaedrus speech would suggest that, if lovers can channel their erotic longing through the lens of moderation, then lovers can mutually fulfill both public responsibility and sexual longing—through erotic moderation, both lovers and beloveds can lead noble, successful, and fulfilling public and private lives, satiating their variety of desires in a beneficial way. Further, if lovers allow Love to guide their hearts, they will be open to courage, a necessary condition for philosophy and a virtue that inspires great and noble deeds. In a word, erotic energy is sublimated so public virtue and private desire can coalesce, the result of which is mutual flourishing, satisfaction, and thus happiness. Altogether, he does not so much tell us what Love is, Phaedrus does tell us what Love is like, what it gives, and *how* he thinks we ought to love and *why*.

2.5 Pausanias' Erotic Conventions

Next, after non-notable speeches (180c), Pausanias presents what seems to be a politic-legal interpretation of love. He begins by voicing his uneasiness to Phaedrus that the subject, Love, has not been “well defined,” and he accuses Phaedrus of eulogizing (180c). The discussion about Love would be simple, if Love were a simple thing, and hence why Phaedrus has understandably gone astray (180c). Pausanias feels it incumbent upon himself to “put our discussion back on the right track” (180d), proceeding with a distinction between two kinds of Love, two Aphrodites, though he later admits his encomium is little more than a “hasty improvisation” (185c).

Pausanias informs the party that it is “a well-known fact that Love and Aphrodite are inseparable” (180d). Because Love and Aphrodite are inseparable, if there were a single Aphrodite, then there would be a single Love. However, there are two Aphrodites, and therefore

⁶⁵ For a detailed analysis of the desire for recognition and the role of thumos in the speeches of Phaedrus and Alcibiades, see Fussi, *Recognition*, 237–262. Also, consider Newell, *Passion*, 16–17, 25; Josh Wilburn, “Courage and the Spirited Part of the Soul in Plato's Republic,” *Philosopher's Imprint*, vol. 15, no. 26 (2015), 1–21.

two kinds of Love.⁶⁶ Alternatively, perhaps we might say that love seemingly has two sides, two directions, or two *ways* of being, a very important distinction that I ask the reader to keep in mind, and Pausanias emphasizes that “we must still make an effort to keep these two gods apart” conceptually and otherwise (180e).⁶⁷

On the one hand, there is the Love of Vulgar Aphrodite, the base carnal urge that seeks sexual gratification. Such a love is selfish and treats the beloved *solely* as a means, striking “whenever he gets the chance” (181b). In Pausanias’ own words, this is “the love felt by the vulgar, who are attached to women no less than boys, to the body more than the soul, and to the least intelligent partners, since all they care about is completing the sexual act,” calling to mind sexual predators (181b). On the other hand, there is the Love of Heavenly Aphrodite, which is far more sophisticated. This Love, which derives from the Aphrodite “whose descent is purely male,” is homosexual and, like the Aphrodite he accompanies, “is considered older and free from the lewdness of youth,” and hence “those who are inspired by her Love are attracted to the male” (181c). This love is a homoerotic attraction to both the beauty and intellect of *blooming young men*, not little boys (181c–d). This love, liberated from youthful lasciviousness, finds attraction in the more lasting qualities of young men, and Pausanias tells us that a lover inspired by Eros of this sort is eager to “share everything with the one he loves,” cultivate his mind, and spend his entire life with the young man (181d).

What is especially important about Pausanias’ speech is his assertion that “no action is good or bad, honorable or shameful,” but “how it comes out depends entirely on how it is performed” (181a).⁶⁸ Actions themselves are neither good nor bad, and the goodness and badness of an action depends on its relation to context and inner disposition. We cannot evaluate action independent of context, independent of human affairs. Loving is no exception, and “Love is not himself noble and worthy of praise;” what matters is whether “the sentiments he [Eros] produces in us are themselves noble” and whether “he impels us to love in a noble manner”⁶⁹ (181a).

⁶⁶ Rose, *Greek Mythology*, 122–127.

⁶⁷ I ask the reader to keep in mind Pausanias’ dualism of Eros, especially when reflecting on the speeches of Eryximachus and Agathon.

⁶⁸ Pausanias reasserts a similar claim at 183d, “As I said earlier, love is, like *everything* else, *complex*: considered simply in itself, it is neither honorable nor disgraceful—its character depends entirely on the behavior it gives rise to” (emphasis mine). However, a careful reader will notice that this is not what Pausanias said earlier. He has added a claim not only about the nature of love but also about the nature of everything else, a cosmological claim.

⁶⁹ Reading Bury’s interpretation of 181a.

Pausanias is making two distinctions about Love in relation to the human things. Not only does it matter that the sentiments which Eros cultivates in our hearts are themselves noble, but it also matters that we act out those sentiments appropriately, i.e., one's demeanor, which is the outer expression of one's inner life, matters. We can thus see a sort of inner-outer correspondence, a relationship between mind, action, and context, suggesting that human intention and its corresponding action within a particular context is what imbues an action with moral content.

The crux of Pausanias' speech, however, seems to be an analysis of the social, legal, and political dimensions of love, along with a veiled critique of the Athenian pederastic courting practices. In many ways, Pausanias' speech seems to echo and expand many of the ideas put forth by Phaedrus. Pausanias provides a seemingly necessary sketch of some of the conventions to which Phaedrus alludes; these conventions should moderate erotic relationships such that lovers should subsequently instill convention in their beloved and perpetuate it through that beloved. For instance, Pausanias forwards an argument for the necessity of laws regulating love, specifically that "there should be a law forbidding affairs with young boys," for the "vulgar" require "external restraint" to quell their "hasty" and "unfair" passions (181e–182a). For these vulgar are those who give love "such a bad reputation" (182a).⁷⁰

To solve this issue, Pausanias advocates the seemliness that we catch whiff of in Phaedrus's speech, and he goes so far as to outline the conventions that serve as a framework for this seemly conduct. While the customs regarding love in Athens do have shortcomings (and it is not altogether unlikely that Plato is criticizing these conventions), Pausanias calls us to recognize that Athenian customs are "remarkably complex" in comparison to the mores of love in other cities, and that Athenian custom promotes 'noble conquest and submission' on the basis of two principles (182b, 182e, 184c–d). We now turn to those principles.

The first principle is the necessity of a proper attitude and behaviour between both parties in accordance to Athenian custom;⁷¹ the second, the necessity for both parties to love virtue and wisdom more generally, that the lover and his beloved alike are "to make virtue their central

⁷⁰ One should note, however, that Pausanias remains ambiguous as to whether exploiting young men is morally abhorrent, or whether such a relationship is simply bad because it is a shaky investment on behalf of the lover (181e).

⁷¹ Keeping in mind that the lover is given a great deal of freedom in his pursuit of the beloved. "The freedom given to the lover by both gods and men according to our custom is immense" (183c).

concern” (185b–c). It is necessary that both principles “must be combined if a young man is to accept a lover in an honorable way” (184c–d). However, it is always honourable to subjugate oneself for the sake of virtue, according to Pausanias, “*whatever the outcome*” (185b).⁷² It is this pursuit, the desire and willingness to do anything for virtue and wisdom, that constitutes Heavenly Love, while “all other forms belong to the vulgar goddess” (185c2). These would seem to be the customs and principles that lovers mean to instill in and perpetuate through their beloved, the social customs that promote mutual love of virtue. In the words of Pausanias: “We can now see the point of our customs: they are designed to separate the wheat from the chaff” (184a).

Pausanias thus clarifies and articulates the conventions that shape the ideal relationship (the very conventions this relationship means to perpetuate) outlined by Phaedrus—the ideal relationship being philosophical friendship.⁷³ Unlike Phaedrus, Pausanias explicitly states his understanding of Love’s role in public and private affairs, and the value of Eros: “Love’s value

⁷² Emphasis mine. Consider Socrates’ assertion at *Euthydemus* 282a–b, which strikingly resembles the claim of Pausanias. Note, however, a few key differences. “And for a man who thinks he ought to get this [i.e., wisdom/virtue] from his father much more than money, and not only from his father but also from his guardians and friends (*especially* those of his city and elsewhere *who claim to be his lovers*), and who begs and beseeches them to give him some wisdom, there is nothing shameful, Clinias, nor disgraceful if, for the sake of this, he should become the servant or the slave of a lover or of any man, being willing to perform *any honourable service* in his desire to become wise.” Emphasis mine.

⁷³ It would seem that the love customs of a regime not only reflect the virtue and moral understanding of that regime, but also reflect and perpetuate the fundamental interests of that regime and its people. With an assertion that might encourage consideration, Pausanias expresses how the understanding of love within a regime is a reflection of that regime itself: “So you can see that the plain condemnation of Love reveals a lust for power in the rulers and cowardice in the ruled, while indiscriminate approval testifies to general dullness and stupidity” (182d). In a phrase, it would seem that a nation’s understanding of love expresses something notable about the nature of a people and their regime. Keep in mind that Athenian love custom as outlined by Pausanias is neither puritanical nor degenerate. Rather, he presents the customs of love as mixed, moderate, with a leaning toward abstinence and self-restraint. As a further point, I agree with Rosen that the city is fundamentally erotic in its founding both practical and theoretical. See Stanley Rosen, “The Role of Eros in Plato’s *Republic*,” *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 18, no. 3 (1965), 471. I add that there is the further erotic element inherent to city in its perpetuation, for its perpetuation is intertwined with the perpetuation of self through private erotic relationships. The city is erotic through and through. As for the ideal model of friendship, Frisbee Sheffield argues contra Gregory Vlastos that *Symposium* is not about personal relationships, but about desire and the sorts of objects of desire that are conducive to the human good and happy life. She argues that Plato is considering the types of *values* that should inform pederastic relationships, and thus human relationships principally play a *contextual* role in *Symposium*. In her view, we find a clearer image of the ideal model of friendship in *Phaedrus*. See Frisbee C. C. Sheffield, “VIII—Beyond *Eros*: Friendship in the *Phaedrus*,” *The Aristotelian Society*, vol. CXI, (2011), 251–253, and n.5. Newell makes a similar observation, that *Symposium* discusses which objects are naturally most worth choosing for a happy life. See Newell, *Passion*, 70; Waller R. Newell, *Tyranny: A New Interpretation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 53. Alternatively, Alexander Nehamas suggests that philosophical friendship remains a necessary condition *throughout* the climb of Diotima’s ladder—the philosopher still cares for his boy, even on the highest rung. See Nehamas, “Contemplation of Beauty,” 3–5. I have more sympathy to the reading of Newell and Nehamas, though I concede that the focus of *Symposium* does not seem to be friendship.

to the city as a whole and to the citizens is immeasurable, for he *compels* the lover and his loved one alike to make virtue their central concern” (185b–c).⁷⁴ However, though other than his distinction between the two forms of Love and their effects, Pausanias, like Phaedrus before him, does not tell us what Love is, though he outlines in starker terms his thoughts on the role of eros public and privately, and his thoughts on how we ought to love.

Plato now introduces an interesting literary device. Allegedly, Aristophanes was to speak next following Pausanias, but hiccups overcome the poet (185c).⁷⁵ Aristophanes asks Eryximachus, a doctor, to cure him or take his turn (185d). The doctor agrees to do both, and employs his craft to “cure” the comic poet (185d). Just as Pausanias built on the speech of Phaedrus, so too does Eryximachus build on the speeches, or rather inherit the argument, of his predecessors.⁷⁶

2.6 Eryximachus and the ‘Science’ of Love

Eryximachus presents what I interpret as love from the perspective of τέχνη (techne) and natural philosophy, natural science, or rather physical science. In a word, Eryximachus seems to echo many ideas of the natural philosophers, the Presocratics, especially those of Heraclitus.⁷⁷ After

⁷⁴ Emphasis mine.

⁷⁵ The meaning and purpose of this shift is ambiguous. Lowenstam discusses a number of possible meanings for Aristophanes’ hiccups and the changed speaking order. His interpretation corresponds with my own general speculation, viz. that the speeches progress with regard to the divinity of their subject matter. In other words, the speeches climb ontologically, from the human things to the sublime. However, unlike Lowenstam, I am not convinced that it makes great difference whether Aristophanes or Eryximachus speaks first. For instance, one can read the reversal as suggestion that Plato prefers poetry and mythology to craftsmanship and science. However, one could riposte that because Eryximachus employs his craft to “cure” Aristophanes’ hiccups, it would suggest that the poet is dependent on the craftsman, suggesting the hierarchy of the initial speaking order. Regardless, I am of the mind that one can scale a mountain from a variety of different angles with a variety of different tools. To me, the reversal suggests that, at this step, it matters not which path one takes, science or mythology, as both speeches aim beyond themselves toward that which underlies the harmony and concord in the cosmos. See Steven Lowenstam, “Aristophanes’ Hiccups,” *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 27, no. 1 (1986), 43–56. I praise Paul O’Mahoney’s excellent reading of the hiccup scene, though I do not altogether agree with his conclusions about eros, philosophy, and the relationship between the two. See Paul O’Mahoney, “On the ‘Hiccapping Episode’ in Plato’s Symposium,” *Classical World*, vol. 104, no. 2 (2011), 143–159.

⁷⁶ At the beginning of his speech, the doctor says that Pausanias “introduced a crucial consideration in his speech, though in my opinion he did not develop it sufficiently,” the distinction between the Love of Heavenly Aphrodite and the Love of Common Aphrodite (185e). That Eryximachus acknowledges that there is a distinct argument in play is acknowledged in two places. First, at the beginning of his speech, Eryximachus says he seeks to carry out Pausanias’ “*argument* to its logical conclusion,” and at the end of his speech, Eryximachus encourages Aristophanes to “complete the *argument*” (185e–186a, 188e; Emphasis mine). The fact that speeches are framed as an argument strongly suggests that there is a logical conclusion to which the party is moving toward dialectically.

⁷⁷ Sextus Empiricus, for example, considers Heraclitus a natural philosopher. See Daniel W. Graham, trans., *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy: The Completed Fragments and Selected Testimonies of the Major Presocratics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 185. Also note that Eryximachus quotes Heraclitus at 187b.

prescribing a regimen to Aristophanes, the doctor begins with a preamble; that if he has “learned a single lesson” from his field of expertise, the *science* of medicine, it is that Love (in both its manifestations, a distinction following Pausanias) is not simply a matter of the human soul’s attraction and longing to human beauty. In other words, while eros plays a salient role in both public and private life, eros is *not* exclusively a human affair, according to Eryximachus.

Instead, Eryximachus posits that Love is a “significantly broader phenomenon,” a phenomenon we can observe in the animate kingdoms of Fauna and Animalia (186a–b). But the doctor pushes further than love’s relationship with the living. He asserts that Love is a phenomenon that transpires “everywhere in the universe,” a phenomenon that “directs everything that occurs, not only in the human domain, but also in that of the gods” (186b). On this point, distinctions are necessary. First, Eryximachus does not restrict the phenomenon of love to the domain of human or even biological life. Instead, he posits that love encompasses the *whole* of the universe, which necessarily includes the inanimate. This would suggest that Love itself—which must ontologically supersede both its harmonious and destructive forms—is a larger force of Nature that encompasses the Whole (consider 205b). Eryximachus expresses this truth when he encourages the necessity for practitioners of every craft to encourage consonance between Heavenly, Uranian, harmonizing Love and Vulgar, Polyhymnian, disharmonizing Love, “these two species of Love, which are, indeed, to be found everywhere” (187e–188a).⁷⁸ Second, and stemming from the first, if we are to grant that the gods are part of the universe, it would seem that love encompasses the divine as well. This would suggest that Love is supranatural and preternatural—Eryximachus seemingly anticipates the speech of Aristophanes. Third, the notion that eros directs *everything* that occurs in both the human and divine realms calls into question the randomness of existence. Following the two species of Love outlined above, this would imply that the state of the universe oscillates in between the extremes of motion and rest.

After his hearty and pregnant preamble, Eryximachus thrusts forwards with “some remarks concerning medicine,”⁷⁹ beginning his analysis of love from the perspective of craft (186b). Whereas Phaedrus and Pausanias chiefly evaluate the role of love within the social

⁷⁸ The relationship between love and craft is further explored in Agathon’s speech.

⁷⁹ For an amusing, though pregnant, comment about doctors and their art from Heraclitus, see Graham, *Fragments*, 163.

dimension,⁸⁰ Eryximachus moves from human sexuality and social convention to an analysis of the micro and macro dimensions of Love's two species reflected in Nature, and he does this through the lens of craft-knowledge. Beginning with the micro, which is akin to the private, the doctor draws parallel between the human body and the city, foreshadowing *Republic* (186c).⁸¹ In a single clever phrase, Eryximachus condenses his understanding of the two species of love that derives from a life in the medical profession; he says that "dissimilar subjects desire and love objects that are themselves dissimilar" (186b).⁸² With this utterance, Eryximachus captures the productive and destructive, benevolent and malevolent qualities of Love, the latter of which is of particular interest to tyranny. He then moves on to proclaim that his craft seeks to establish harmony and concord in the body by transforming its desires and reconciling mutual love between the bodily elements, and it achieves this goal by regulating and reconciling the two species of Love present in the body (186d). Further, according to the good doctor, all crafts aim to study, regulate, and establish harmony by resolving discord between these two species of love in their objects, be it medicine, physical education, farming, poetry, astronomy, divination, and "all other domains" (187a, 187e, 188b–d). Oddly enough, Love guides medicine's reconciliation

⁸⁰ An analysis of private erotic relationships, ideal or otherwise, within the broader context of Athenian mores.

⁸¹ From a contemporary perspective, one of the most astonishing theses that Eryximachus seems to forward is the implication that human conventions, crafts, and their objects reflect Nature. We can infer this thesis when Eryximachus' draws the parallel between the city's conventions and the body at 186c. Conventions, crafts, and goods reflect Nature insofar as they all aim beyond themselves in pursuit of mutual concord between the two species of Love, which Eryximachus describes as "absolute" in its presence and power of direction everywhere in the universe (186b, 188d). Love thus seems a primordial force of being in some way similar to Schopenhauer's Will. Regardless, Nature oscillates between these two species of Love, between harmony and disharmony, as exemplified in temperate climates, bountiful harvests, and good health as contraposed to hail storms, blight, and disease (188a–b). While Eryximachus is silent on whether Nature herself pursues orderliness or capriciously fluctuates between these two extremes, it would seem that crafts are guided by Love and try to reproduce lasting order in their products, and both the craft itself and its product simultaneously point beyond themselves toward the unity and concord of Heavenly love reflected in the cosmos. Further, τέχνη as creative or altering processes manipulate otherwise nebulous nature to create a lasting harmony. It would seem that if we employ crafts well and 'help' nature to establish harmony, then she rewards us with bounty and health. Just as the city is erotic through and through, it would seem that the universe as a whole is erotic to the core. On the idea of the universe as a single harmony composed of the blending of contraries, see Heraclitus in Graham, *Fragments*, 159–163. On the relationship between the speech of Eryximachus and the philosophy of Heraclitus, see Newell, *Passion*, 72.

⁸² We can extrapolate a number of different characteristics of love from this phrase. First, we must keep in mind that Eryximachus accepts the distinction of the two species of love, Vulgar and Heavenly respectively. On the one hand, we can interpret the phrase to mean that unlikes are drawn unto unlikes, or simply that opposites attract. This would mean that hot has a necessary relationship with cold, tall with short, peace with strife, and so forth. On the other hand, we can interpret the phrase to mean that love is a lack and a desire for things that are necessarily unlike us but not necessarily opposite to us. For instance, the moderately healthy can want to be healthier, or one can love someone who possesses both similar and dissimilar interests. Further, the doctor's assertion suggests elements both chaotic and harmonic with a strong leaning on the latter, especially if we keep in mind the two species of Love and Eryximachus' emphasis on remedying discord.

of love along with that of every other craft, for it directs everything that occurs (186b, 187a). If we were to take Eryximachus seriously, it would seem that Love is in some sense reflexive. Love is reflexive insofar as it aims toward its own higher manifestation through humans and their crafts as instantiations of itself within Nature more generally. Love, in a sense, thus aims to order itself through itself.

At 188c, Eryximachus introduces the final topic of his speech by asking his first and final question: What is the origin of all impiety?⁸³ The source of impiety is our “refusal to gratify the orderly [Uranian] kind of love, and our deference to the other sort [Polyhymnian], when we should have been guided by the former sort of Love in every action in connection with our parents, living or dead, and with the gods” (188c). It would seem that impiety stems from our failure to guide our lives in accordance with Heavenly, Uranian love, instead succumbing to the Vulgar, Polyhymnian variety. It is interesting that Eryximachus couples parents with the gods, the ancestral and conventional with the divine, and thus in a sense entangles filial piety and seamliness with piety of the divine sort.

The bonds of human society and concord with the gods are among the great gifts of Love directed toward the good with temperance and justice (188d). Not only are these gifts of Love good with regard to themselves, but if “our object is to try and maintain the proper kind of Love and to attempt to cure the kind that is diseased,” then we must establish harmony between these gifts so that they are good with regard to each other as well (188c). Subsequently, it would seem that the harmony between these two gifts, the bonds of human society and concord with the gods, is a necessary condition for the great goods of happiness and good fortune, the latter also known as wisdom, “something even a child would know” (Euthd. 279d). Thus, because the object of philosophy is wisdom, the greatest good fortune, it would seem that one must philosophize in such a way that promotes harmony and unity among gods, men, and nature, and not indulge Polyhymnian Love and those practices that alienate, divide, and undermine the conventional, divine, ancestral, and natural.⁸⁴ This might be the core of the Socratic turn.⁸⁵

⁸³ A question, according to Nehamas and Woodruff’s translation.

⁸⁴ It might be worth keeping in mind that one can characterize philosophy as a manifestation of Love directed with temperance and justice toward the good, and thus philosophy is necessarily erotic.

⁸⁵ See Newell, *Ruling Passion*, 88.

Eryximachus thus entrusts Aristophanes with the argument so that he may complete it, or do otherwise (188e). Aristophanes admits that he has in mind “a different approach to speaking” than the preceding speakers (189c). Although, I am not persuaded that Aristophanes throws the argument aside, neither do I think that his use of humorous imagery altogether undermines the seeming ontological climb in the background of the dialogue.⁸⁶ Though Aristophanes affably prods Eryximachus, I think the comic poet is being honest when he tells Eryximachus not to throw up his guard and says that the poet’s worry is not that he will say something funny, but that he “might say something ridiculous” (189b).⁸⁷ However, Socrates himself says many fine things and ridiculous things, and the devil is in clarifying which are which. Regardless, the principle of charity and Plato’s own genius should compel us to give Aristophanes the benefit of the doubt. Frankly, I find it hard to accept that one of Plato’s crowning literary achievements is little more than a slap on the knee and an intermission to use the john.

2.7 Aristophanes’ Teaching and the Lovers’ Riddle

Aristophanes’ approach to speaking is truly different from that of his predecessors. He emphasizes this difference at both the beginning and the end of his speech (189c, 193d). However, Aristophanes’ speech is not entirely alien to those of his predecessors; like Phaedrus, Aristophanes does not make a duality out of love; like Eryximachus, Aristophanes discusses love through the medium of his craft, poetry.⁸⁸ Rather than speak forth plainly like his predecessors, Aristophanes weaves an erotic mythos. The purpose of myth is to explain or comment on some

⁸⁶ For interpretations of Aristophanes’ speech that seemingly suggest the comic poet’s speech is an ontological step backward, see Newell, *Ruling Passion*, 72–74; Anthony Hooper, “The Greatest Hope of All: Aristophanes on Human Nature in Plato’s *Symposium*.” *Classical Quarterly* 63 (2013): 567–579, especially 575, 577–578; Zuckert, *Plato’s Philosophers*, 291–293; Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 171–176; Suzanne Obdrzalek, “Moral Transformation and the Love of Beauty in Plato’s *Symposium*,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 48, no. 4 (2010), 418–419, 427.

⁸⁷ One might consider the many ridiculous things Socrates says, and whether what we think ridiculous might not necessarily be so. See *Republic* 450d–451b5, 452a–c, 473c, and especially 452d4–e2 when Socrates says, “[W]hat was ridiculous to the eyes disappeared in the light of what’s best revealed in speeches. And this showed that he is empty who believes anything is ridiculous other than the bad, and who tries to produce laughter looking at any sight as ridiculous other than the foolish and the bad; or, again, he looks seriously to any standard of beauty he sets up other than the good.” If one reads this passage as suggesting that perhaps Aristophanes is empty, one might consider Socrates utterance at *Symposium* 219a, especially Benardete’s translation thereof, and consider Newell, *Ruling Passion*, 94 for a fascinating discussion of the *technē* of nothingness. One might also consider that Aristophanes tells Eryximachus not to turn his speech into a comedy at 193c.

⁸⁸ Which of the two speeches is ontologically higher is debatable. My own reading is that while both speeches seemingly diverge in different directions, both arrive at the same logical conclusion and are thus ontologically equal yet lacking the explanation of the other. We can think of them both as mutually supplementary. Hence, my assertion above that it matters not whether Eryximachus or Aristophanes speaks first.

natural or social phenomenon. This suggests that myths are pregnant with meaning and truth, potentially containing both exoteric and esoteric dimensions. This would make Aristophanes' wish to pass on his "teaching" about eros even more curious (189d3).⁸⁹ Regardless, Aristophanes' new myth employs an abundance of images and symbols that seem to enshroud the meaning of his speech and his understanding of eros.

Aristophanes begins by framing his speech on Love with philanthropic and anthropocentric sentiments or considerations, portraying Love as the god most intimate with the concerns of human life and wellbeing (189d). The poet then employs his art to weave a myth of primordial origin, describing Human Nature long ago, as it was at inception, when it "was not what it is now, but very different" (189d). His "first point" is that there were *three* "kinds" of human beings, not *two* as there are now—the male, the female, and the androgyne, the latter "a combination" of "male and female elements" (189d–e). His "second point" is that our original constitution was circular, round, or spherical (189e, 190b). Anatomically, these beings had two sets of limbs and genitals, and "two faces, exactly alike, on a rounded neck" (189e–190a).⁹⁰ Further, according to Aristophanes, these three kinds of humans—male, female, and androgynous—are the offspring, of sun, earth, and moon respectively (190b). They, or rather we, are not born of Olympian gods.

Aristophanes employs some thought-provoking imagery early in his speech, which might suggest that Aristophanes' speech is filigree cloaking something subterranean. What I mean is that Aristophanes' speech might suggest elements of the chthonic mysteries and arcane arts, among other things. While this might shed further light on Aristophanes' "teaching" of eros, I do not think this reading of Aristophanes' speech is unequivocal evidence that Plato writes esoterically or that he uses Aristophanes as a medium to subtly voice his own views.

⁸⁹ The possibility of esotericism creates two difficulties, however. First, there is no tried and true method of divining a secret teaching. There are outlines for reading and writing esoterically, along with hints and markers for the careful to recognize esoteric writers. See Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 23–26, 30, 59, 61, 63–65, 70–73, 75, 90–91, 100–101 n.17, 104 n.27, 106 n.32, 110, 111 n.45, 116, 121. However, despite these tools, it is alarmingly easy to misconstrue ambiguous and equivocal language and symbolism. One can very easily take a wrong turn while believing himself to be taking the right turn. Second, one cannot prove that Aristophanes speaks, or rather that Plato writes, esoterically. Even if there are grains of esotericism within the speech of Aristophanes, I think there is an argument to be made that we have an inclination to read into others the concerns that haunt our own minds.

⁹⁰ The imagery of the head is especially curious. Immediately, one calls to mind the Etruscan god and the Roman god of doorways, underworld, and beginnings and ends, Culsans and Janus.

According to certain esoteric circles with an interest in sacred science, specifically alchemy and sacred geometry, both number and geometric shape possess symbolic meaning.⁹¹ Let us begin with Aristophanes' "first point," specifically the numbers immediately introduced in the speech and their potential significance, the numbers three and two. The geometric expression of two is two points, two lines, or an angle, all of which reflect opposition, be it opposition of poles or the opposition of reflective dualism and binary more generally, such as the variance of subject and object, or the distinction between man and nature.⁹² Opposition is synonymous with struggle and counterpoise, and two is thus a representation of the inner disharmony and the disintegration of unity.⁹³ For these reasons, the number two is ominous and problematic. The number three, on the other hand, finds its geometric expression in the three points of the triangle.⁹⁴ Three creates harmony out of duality by mitigating the tension between opposing poles. Through the imposition of harmony on duality, three is a sort of synthesis, an expression of creation and the growth of unity within itself.⁹⁵ Three is thus a sublime and heavenly number. I ask the reader to keep in mind that Aristophanes describes the transition of Human Nature in the beginning to what it is now, at present, as a shift from the number three to the number two (189d–e).⁹⁶

Aristophanes' "second point" introduces further geometric symbolism. The poet describes the shape of each primordial human as round, circular, spherical (189e, 190b). The circle and the sphere are the only geometric shapes without division, for they are equal at all points, the most unified and thus important and universal of all geometric symbols, for they have neither beginning nor end.⁹⁷ The circles and sphere reflect a great variety of complimentary concepts. For instance, these geometric shapes transcend the binary of masculine and feminine, for they encompass All; they signify the eternity and infinity of sublime perfection expressive of

⁹¹ See Julius Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, (Rochester: Inner Traditions International, 1995); *The Hermetic Tradition*, (Rochester: Inner Traditions International, 1995); René Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, (Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2004); *Symbols of Sacred Science*, (Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2004); J.E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd: 1978).

⁹² Cirlot, *Symbols*, 232.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 232, 235.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 232, 336.

⁹⁶ "There were three kinds of human beings, that's my first point—not two, as there are now, male and female."

⁹⁷ Jack Tresidder, *The Watkins Dictionary of Symbols*, (London, Watkins Publishing, 2008), 35–37. Cirlot, *Symbols*, 47–48.

universal harmonious, unified Oneness.⁹⁸ Further, these geometric shapes are indicative of all cyclical processes, the celestial bodies and their motions, along with the cosmos as a whole. Primeval humans share the quality of sphericity, among many other qualities, with their celestial parents, the sun, earth, and moon. We now turn our attention to these other shared qualities between parents and offspring.

Aristophanes tells the party that the nature (which includes sex) and circular anatomical structure of primeval humans find their source genealogically. In the words of Aristophanes, “The male kind was originally an offspring of the sun, the female of the earth, and the other one that combined both genders was an offspring of the moon, because the moon shares in both [i.e., the sun and earth],” and they were spherical “because they were like their parents in the sky” (190b). Aristophanes is masking a distinction here. Each kind of circleman is the way it is, both nature and form, *because* it is the offspring of its respective parent. Each celestial body imparts its characteristics to its offspring, or in idiomatic terms, if it’s in the ram, it’s in the lamb. This begs the question: What is the nature of our celestial parentage, and what characteristics do these parents impart to us?

Aristophanes’ discussion of our celestial parents is brisk. However, unimportance does not follow necessarily from briskness. Aristophanes provides some clues about our astral begetters. For starters, if we reason from progeny back to progenitor, then the sun is masculine, the earth is feminine, and the moon is androgynous. This account of the planets and elements accords with many esoteric traditions, especially those sympathetic to the arcane arts.⁹⁹ The sun, whose representative element according to classical alchemy is fire, typically connotes masculinity, heroic spirit, regality, youthful virility and passion, the fire of libido, and victory.¹⁰⁰ The sun is a symbol of the soul and its virility.¹⁰¹ The sun thus understood is an assertive source of life, creativity, activity.¹⁰² The earth, whose alchemic element reflects its namesake, signifies passivity, femininity, matter, fertility, sensuality, life and death, and motherliness, suggestive of

⁹⁸ Tresidder, *Symbols*, 35–37, 139. Cirlot, *Symbols*, 31, 47–48, 292. Evola, *Hermetic*, 21–22.

⁹⁹ Evola, *Hermetic*, 33–40. Evola also suggests that the sun, moon, and earth are synonymous to soul, spirit, and body respectively. Evola, *Hermetic*, 44.

¹⁰⁰ Cirlot, *Symbols*, 317–318; Evola, *Revolt*, 8–9, 13, 38, 58; *Hermetic*, 33, 36.

¹⁰¹ Evola, *Hermetic*, 36, 39–40, 44.

¹⁰² Consider Plato’s famous imagery at *Republic* 507b–509c.

why it evokes the title “Mother Earth.”¹⁰³ The earth is a symbol of matter and the world of bodies.¹⁰⁴ The chthonic mysteries also have a close relationship with the earth and moon, and some circles associate these bodies with the dark arts or evil, ontologically or otherwise.¹⁰⁵ The moon, like the earth, typically connotes femininity.¹⁰⁶ However, unlike the earth, the moon is a volatile and mutable principle, for it possesses qualities of both the earth and the sun, feminine and masculine.¹⁰⁷ The moon is a symbol of the plasmic forces of becoming, especially with regard to human spirit.¹⁰⁸ The moon reabsorbs forms and generates them, holding sway over phenomena, such as growth and death.¹⁰⁹ The moon has a strong relationship with water and hence the menstrual cycle, and the moon amplifies the nebulous side of femininity such as madness, obsession, and lunacy.¹¹⁰

This illustration of the celestial bodies corresponds with Aristophanes’ characterization of primeval humans, especially the natures of each of their ‘halves,’ post Olympian division (190e, 191d–192b). Succinctly, the sun imparts active, masculine qualities to its offspring, the male circlemen, which we see post-division in the hyper-masculinity of gay men. Aristophanes describes the ‘true’ children of the sun, gay men, as “the most manly in their nature,” who are “bold and brave and masculine” and “real men in politics” (191e–192b). Likewise, the earth imparts to its daughters, lesbians, exclusively passive and feminine qualities, and the moon imparts to its descendants, heterosexuals, which are a mix of solar and earthly, active and passive qualities (191d–e). Not only do the planetary parents pass on their spherical form to their progeny, but it would seem that they imprint their respective qualities in the souls of their respective young as well.

Establishing the relationship between parents and progeny, Aristophanes’ myth becomes increasingly curious when we consider our previous discoveries relating to number and shape. The qualities imparted from parents to children seem to yield sibylline significance when juxtaposed to their appropriate alchemic properties and geometric shape. To forward the

¹⁰³ Cirlot, *Symbols*, 112, 318, 367.

¹⁰⁴ Evola, *Hermetic*, 40, 44.

¹⁰⁵ Cirlot, *Symbols*, 25. *Republic* 514a–520a.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 145, 315–216, 318–319. Evola, *Hermetic*, 33.



¹⁰⁷ Cirlot, *Symbols*, 318–319. Also, Evola notes that that the sun and moon change gender depending on overarching principle of a tradition. Evola, *Hermetic*, 36.

¹⁰⁸ Evola, *Hermetic*, 40, 44.

¹⁰⁹ Cirlot, *Symbols*, 304.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 65–66, 145.

investigation, let us return to steadier ground and begin again by reconsidering the number three. The numbers three and two play a significant role throughout Aristophanes' myth, and I have already discussed some mystic aspects of these numbers above. While I am aware that the proceeding sections will raise eyebrows, I ask the reader to bear with me and follow the argument to its end. The Western tradition has a vein of occult teachings, studies, and practices that we as contemporaries dismiss and ignore. Even if alchemy, numerology, sacred geometry, and the arcane arts are bunk by contemporary scientific standards, these teachings, studies, and practices do contain literary and historic significance. They are part of the world of tradition. For let us recall what John Maynard Keynes says about Sir Isaac Newton: "Newton was not the first of the age of reason. He was the last of the magicians, the last of the Babylonians and Sumerians, the last great mind that looked out on the visible and intellectual world with the same eyes as those who began to build our intellectual inheritance rather less than 10,000 years ago."¹¹¹

Three is a number of human significance. Three is significant because the number and its geometric expression, the triangle, are characteristic and symbolic of the human soul.¹¹² Beside the human soul, the triangle also has alchemical significance, the triangle a suggestive bridge between the former and latter. For instance, the classical alchemical symbols for fire and air are  and , respectively.¹¹³ The equilateral triangle standing on its base is a male, and both fire and air are masculine elements reflective of male qualities naturally and conventionally understood. Fire is an earthly representation of the sun, and so too are fire's qualities imitative of the sun's symbolism of erotic passion, libido, assertiveness, as well as the ascending strength of the soul.¹¹⁴ Likewise, Aristophanes' male circummen and post-division gays are born of the sun. They are earthly imitations of the sun and its qualities, and they gravitate exclusively toward those same qualities (191e–192b). We can thus infer that, by virtue of both fire and male circummen being earthly imitations of the sun, and because the triangle symbolizes the human

¹¹¹ John Maynard Keynes, *Newton, the Man*, Speech retrieved from, http://phys.columbia.edu/~millis/3003Spring2016/Supplementary/John%20Maynard%20Keynes_%20%22Newton,%20the%20Man%22.pdf.

¹¹² Cirlot, *Symbols*, 223, 336. Also consider the importance of three and triangular structure and relationship of the soul at *Republic* 435c, 436a, 440e–441a, 441c, 443d, 444b and *Phaedrus* 246a–254e. Three also remedies the conflict of dualism numerically, geometrically, and ontologically, which I discuss below.

¹¹³ Evola, *Hermetic*, 41. The line suggests a sort of stoppage or break in ascension or descent. See Evola, *Hermetic*, 39–41, 48.

¹¹⁴ Cirlot, *Symbols*, 105–106. Evola, *Hermetic*, 36, 39, 44.

soul as well as the basic four elements, then souls of male circlemen are analogous to, or predominated by, alchemic fire, \triangle , for they are men with fiery souls.¹¹⁵

Following this line of reasoning, the classical alchemical symbols for water and earth are ∇ and ∇ respectively.¹¹⁶ The inverted equilateral triangle is female, suggestive of the pelvic region, and both water and earth are feminine elements reflective of female qualities conventionally and naturally understood.¹¹⁷ Earth is a receptive, malleable, and terrestrial element that represents matter, a reflection of the sensual and generative qualities of Mother Earth. Like their male counterparts, “women who are split from a woman, however, pay no attention at all to men; they are oriented more towards women,” i.e., lesbians, by-product of those originally born of earth, gravitate exclusively to those qualities characteristic of the earth and her children (191e). Given our earlier observations about male circlemen being a terrestrial image of the sun’s qualities with souls analogous to, or predominated by, alchemic fire, it seems as though female circlemen and lesbians are images of the earth’s qualities with souls analogous to, or predominated by, alchemic earth, ∇ , though Aristophanes does not describe them in much detail.






To complete the analysis of the male and female circlemen and their offshoots, gays and lesbians, we must combine the geometric shapes that signify the souls of male and female circlemen and the qualities that predominate each, \triangle and ∇ respectively, with the geometric shape that represents their body, the circle. In other words, we must amalgamate the inner with the outer, both geometrically and emblematically, shape and meaning. Male circlemen find their complete geometric expression in the combination of the equilateral triangle with the circle, \triangle . This geometric symbol suggests the masculine solar characteristics I outline above within a harmonious and unified singularity. Female circlemen find their complete geometric expression in the combination of the inverted equilateral triangle with the circle, ∇ . This geometric symbol suggests the feminine earthly characteristics I outline above within a unified and harmonious singularity. Both of these geometric expressions, however, while to a great degree harmonious with themselves, create a duality among each other rather than concord. Therefore, neither of


¹¹⁵ Consider Graham, *Fragments*, 193.

¹¹⁶ Evola, *Hermetic*, 41–43.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 36, 39.

these geometric expressions are themselves ultimate nor are they separately complete, for each lacks their respective opposite. They are dualistic because the erotic longing in the souls of male and female circlemen, and subsequently the homosexual soul, always longs for what is like itself, like drawn to like. Consequently, each male and female circleman (along with their homosexual offshoots) cannot incorporate into itself what is unlike itself, geometrically or otherwise, and neither male nor female can overcome the binary of sexuality, empirically or transcendentally. Whether or not this is a problem, I leave open to interpretation.

Now we turn our attention to the children of the moon, the androgynous. The moon imparts to its descendants a mix of both solar and earthly qualities, engendering a synthesis of female and male. Following our earlier discussion, the triangle represents the human soul. An equilateral triangle standing on its base reflects the male soul, an inverted equilateral triangle reflecting the female soul. Male circlemen, by virtue of being children of the sun, have souls that are analogous to, or predominated by, alchemic fire, , for they, like fire, are an imitation of the sun and its masculine, virile qualities. Female circlemen, by virtue of being children of the earth, have souls that are analogous to, or predominated by, alchemic earth, , for they, like earth, are an imitation of the earth mother and her feminine, sensual qualities. The androgyne, by contrast, is an emblem of altogether synthesis of antitheses within the manifold of ontological planes. Because the androgyne is both male and female yet neither, the representation of its soul in geometric terms results in the marrying of the equilateral triangle resting on its base and the inverted equilateral triangle. Similarly, just as male and female circlemen have souls analogous to, or predominated by, alchemic fire  and alchemic earth  respectively, the soul of the androgyne is analogous to the congelation of these alchemical elements. The result of fusing these geometric shapes, alchemic properties, sexes, and the respective meanings of each, finds its expression in the geometric shape of the hexagram, , the classical symbol of ambivalence, equilibrium, neutrality, *and* hermaphroditism.¹¹⁸

To complete our schematic of the androgyne, we must amalgamate the inner with the outer, both geometrically and emblematically. The androgynous thus find their complete geometric expression in the combination of the hexagram with the circle, . This coalescence

¹¹⁸ Cirlot, *Symbols*, 223, 233. Evola, *Hermetic*, 21, 40, 45 n. 3, 47.

signifies the integration of *all four* alchemic elements, both sexes, and all binaries into a unified and undivided harmonious geometric singularity. Geometrically, the androgyne heals the division between male and female outlined above, which further suggests that the state of androgyny signifies the reconciliation and satisfaction of all pairs of opposites into single integrated oneness expressed erotically. The expression is erotic insofar as the culmination of eros in the androgynous state is a harmony between the erotic longing among unlikes and the erotic longing between likes, on both a microcosmic and macrocosmic scale. In other words, the eros whose result is the androgynous state is a love of what is unlike itself, a love between unlikes, opposites, such as male and female each longing for the other. Alternatively, the androgyne longs for what is like itself, which is itself, neutrality, and its eros is thus reflexive. Because the androgynous circleman is but a reflection of greater androgyny, the moon, this two-sided androgynous eros seems to be manifest on a microcosmic and macrocosmic scale. Subsequently, the geometric expression of the androgyne seemingly aims beyond the circlemen toward something greater; not only is the lunar condition, androgyny, in some sense the *original* condition of the human soul, but it may suggest that the androgynous condition of the circlemen is an echo of the hermaphroditic nature of the primeval cosmos.¹¹⁹

The analysis now begins to turn the bend. Human Nature was in the beginning a harmony among phantoms of unity. Human Nature was in the beginning a harmony among opposites, a harmony among the three kinds of circlemen suggestive of the mathematical harmony of the number three and its geometric expression, the triangle. However, inner harmony, our outer harmony, and the concord between the two were disturbed. In other words, the geometric unity between soul, spirit, and matter is no more. The result of this interruption is our current condition, dualism, a state of two, an emblem of inner disharmony and the disintegration of unity microcosmically and macrocosmically. Aristophanes portrays this state of disunity as a sort of “Fall” of mankind.

The cause of this fall within the myth of Plato’s Aristophanes is especially curious. According to the myth, in our original harmonious state we were powerful, strong, and ambitious

¹¹⁹ Tom Darby makes a similar observation. He writes, “The androgyne, the perfect being, is not one in whom the mere (biopsychological) tension between the sexes is reconciled, but rather one in whom the spiritual principles of the sexes are reconciled.” See Tom Darby, *The Feast: Meditations on Politics and Time*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 167.

(190b). We made an attempt on the gods and Zeus split us in two as consequence, shaping our bodies and natures into their current dichotomous, lacking condition (190b–c, e). On this point, Aristophanes makes a peculiar distinction. Aristophanes asserts that Homer’s story about the Aloadai, the Giants Otus and Ephialtes, was actually about us in our former harmonious state: The Aloadai, or rather we, “tried to make an ascent to heaven so as to attack the gods” (190b–c). Because we were the Aloadai according to Plato’s Aristophanes, their myth is our own. Because the myth is our own, the myth within a myth within a memory of a memory within a dialogue sheds light on our fall from harmony.

According to tradition, the Aloadai were twin Giants of human build and extraordinarily handsome and beautiful, second only to Orion.¹²⁰ The Aloadai were sons of Poseidon, either in his own form or in that of the river-god Enipeus, and according to some traditions, their mother was Iphimedeia, the wife of Aloeus, while in other traditions, they are children of the Earth, though these distinctions are distinctions in name only.¹²¹ These twins were very young, filled with “mad ambition;” and with the same impetuosity and virile boldness that the young seek to outdo their elders even today, the youthful Aloadai sought to prove that they were the gods’ superiors.¹²² Our arrogance then knew and now knows few boundaries, if any at all. According to H. J. Rose, the quarrel with the gods began when Otus and Ephialtes sought to assert their dominance by making Hera and Artemis their respective wives, though Edith Hamilton adds that the twins really only loved each other.¹²³ To seize what they desired, the twins threatened to overturn nature itself, piling mounts Ossa and Pelion atop Olympos to storm the heavens, and on this point, one ought to note *Plato’s* Aristophanes’ revision of the myth. The Aloadai bound Ares, imprisoning the passionate god of war and father of Eros in a bronze jar for thirteen months where Ares would have perished, thus ending war and strife, had cunning and clear-seeing Hermes not freed him.¹²⁴ However, according to Rose, there are older legends about the Aloadai, legends at least as old as Hesiod, where the twins are beneficent beings, gods of an

¹²⁰ Hamilton, *Mythology*, 184. Rose, *Greek Mythology*, 60–61. Also see *Iliad* V, 385 and *Odyssey* XI, 305 for a full Homeric description of the twins.

¹²¹ Hamilton, *Mythology*, 185. Rose, *Greek Mythology*, 61.

¹²² Hamilton, *Mythology*, 184–185.

¹²³ Rose, *Greek Mythology*, 61. Hamilton, *Mythology*, 185–186.

¹²⁴ Hamilton, *Mythology*, 185. Rose, *Greek Mythology*, 61, 123.

older chthonic tradition, founders of human civilization, and originators of the cult of Muses.¹²⁵ Curious indeed.

Plato's combination of the two myths creates a new perspective on the fall of man. Let us remind ourselves the purpose of myth is to explain or comment on some natural or social phenomenon. In our primeval, congruous state, we were ambitious and powerful, and we "tried to make an ascent to heaven so as to attack the gods" (190b). According the myth of the Alodai—*our* myth—we stacked mountain atop mountain to wage war against the gods, imprisoning Ares, and we sought to take Hera and Artemis as our own to fornicate with them. To be frank, the myth suggests that we overturned nature to conquer the gods; we tried to subdue war and its passions, we sought to cuckold Zeus, and we desired to defile one of Zeus' virgin daughters. But we were *not* successful, and the consequence of our failure is our subsequent division, the upset of our previous harmonious state. Our hubris and impious conduct upset the natural order of things. The myth thus compels us to beg the question: Analogously or literally, what human endeavor overturns nature and challenges the supremacy of the gods, calling their authority and existence into question?

The answer might possibly be philosophy, specifically natural philosophy. The ontological suppositions underpinning a great deal of pre-Socratics and sophists philosophies logically result in tension between man and nature, thus forming a distinction and opposition between man, νόμος (nomos, convention), and φύσις (phusis, nature). As a form of enquiry, natural philosophy inevitably investigates things "above in the sky and below the earth," calling into question the authenticity of conventional, the ancestral, and divine authority (Ap. 19b5). The consequence of this enquiry is the disruption of our primitive harmony (or primitive foolishness, depending on whom you ask) between nature, convention, gods, and each other by introducing a new psychology.¹²⁶ This new psychology, which introduces doubt, plunges man into a state of discord and alienation from the world around him, a transition symbolized by the disintegration of number three into two. Whatever the relationship between man and gods may be, and regardless of whether the founding of civilization is the work of human hands or a gift from those above, this myth might suggest that natural philosophy and impiety, its consequence, upset

¹²⁵ Rose, *Greek Mythology*, 61–62.

¹²⁶ By a new psychology, I mean a new mental characteristic or attitude, a new outlook and understanding of oneself in relation to the world, and the relation of the world to oneself.

the natural order of things, and they are thus the source of our division and perhaps our misery. The solution, which is not to be confused with the cure, is to practice philosophy in such a way that promotes harmony and unity among gods, men, nature, and conventions, which we touched on in the speech of Eryximachus.

Aristophanes' description of the division of primeval man is grotesque. The gods cannot do away with us, for that means doing away with the worship they receive. Instead, they cut us in half and twist us around to form our current constitution. While some might lean toward an atheistic reading of Aristophanes' speech, an atheistic reading does not undermine but reinforces the point I am trying to make. If the conventional gods are indeed our creation, then their godly act of division is merely metaphor for man dividing himself by means of his own hubris. In other words, man divides himself by calling his creation into question, as the former holistic psychology shatters into our current perverted psychological state. Regardless, all of us have an inherent erotic longing for our respective natural, original forms (Smp. 191). For this reason, we engage in the sexual act. The sexual act is the natural expression of the attempt to satisfy the primordial desire for reunification. The sexual act thus aims beyond simple animalian intercourse toward a genuine unification of the physical variety reflective of our original harmonious state as circlemen, or so it would seem, for each human now longs for its other half (191b). This would explain why when we meet our other half, our 'soulmate,' we are overcome by some kind of inexplicable sense of belonging and the desire to spend every moment with our beloved that words cannot justly describe (192b–c). For instance, Aristophanes notes that lovers who spend their entire lives together "cannot say what it is they want from one another" (192c). Hedonistic delights, such as sex and other forms of physical gratification, are not the final object of love.¹²⁷ As Aristophanes puts it, "It's obvious that the soul of every lover longs for something else [beyond sex]; his soul cannot say what it is, but like an oracle it has a sense of what it wants, and like an oracle, hides it behind a riddle" (192d). For this reason, the assertion of Plato's Aristophanes resonates with human experiences, especially those that experience love, when he says, "Love is born into every human being; it calls back the halves of our original nature together; it tries to make one out of two and heal the *wound* of human nature" (191d).¹²⁸ Thus, it would seem at a glance that a return to our circlemanly origin is the aim of eros.

¹²⁷ Contra the reading of Hooper and Saxonhouse.

¹²⁸ Emphasis mine.

As lovers know, glances can be deceiving. Evidence in Aristophanes' speech would suggest, at the famous Net of Hephaestus passage (192c–e),¹²⁹ that eros within the human context aims *beyond* a return to our ancient constitution. In other words, eros is a desire for *more* than physical reunification. For instance, Aristophanes suggests that, if Hephaestus equipped with his “mending tools” were to discover two lovers lying together, and if he were to ask these two lovers what is it that truly desire from one another, then we are to suppose that *they would be perplexed*, according with the lovers riddle. However, Hephaestus asks a second time, this time posing the question differently by articulating the lovers' desire *for* them. In essence, Hephaestus asks the lovers whether their heart's desire is for both lovers to come together as one, to make one out of two and become circlemen once more, forming something that is as unified and *naturally* whole as possible, sharing the same life, and whether this is the greatest fortune one could desire. The lovers' reply would seem to be a resounding and unanimous ‘yes.’

Is the return to our original form *really* the secret to the lover's riddle? The text would suggest perhaps not. As a reply to Hephaestus, Plato's Aristophanes says,

Surely you can see that no one who received such an offer would turn it down; no one would find anything else that he wanted. Instead, everyone would *think* he'd found out at last what he had always wanted: to come together and melt together with the one he loves, so that one emerged from two (192e).¹³⁰

Aristophanes does not confirm that physical reunification is the secret of the lover's riddle. Rather, we *think* that unification with our soul's mate and a return to our original form is what we all desire. However, what we *think* we truly want is distinct from what we *know* we truly want. For this reason Aristophanes says, “‘Love’ is the *name* for our pursuit of wholeness, for our desire to be complete” (192e–193a).¹³¹ We do not actually *know* whether this desire is in fact what love is. Though we call this desire for wholeness of the physical and spiritual variety ‘Love,’ one cannot help but question whether the transient unity of circlemen is authentic wholeness, true wholeness worthy of desire. If anything, it would seem that our earlier eros was misdirected—the haughtiness and boldness of our former state incited us to hubris and

¹²⁹ Consider the 8.313–318 of *Odyssey* and Hermes' role in the myth and the hermetic tradition.

¹³⁰ Emphasis mine. Anthony Hooper makes this excellent observation, Hooper, *Greatest Hope*, 573.

¹³¹ Emphasis mine.

subsequent division and downfall.¹³² Thus, it would seem that our eros must aim to an object of greater ontological magnitude.

Our analysis of eros within Aristophanes' speech seemingly comes full circle. Aristophanes' account of eros does seem compelling; human beings do seem to desire harmony and wholeness. However, what is questionable is whether wholeness and harmony of the terrestrial and transient variety is the real object of this desire. If we recall from the discussion above, circlemen—our former selves—were phantoms of unity, terrestrial manifestations of the qualities embodied by the heavenly sun, earth, and moon. We were not altogether harmonious by virtue of being earthly imitations of the celestial bodies, not to mention that we engaged in reproduction, the process par-excellence of becoming (1918b–c).¹³³ If wholeness is what we truly desire, then a return to our primeval form will leave us wanting and unsatisfied. Rather, if we are to pursue wholeness, then we must aim beyond the phantom of harmony manifest in our former bodies, for our former state too aims beyond itself to a greater harmony. This seems to be true about the harmony expressed in our Uranian parents as well, for they too are phantoms, albeit ontologically higher, of a sort of cosmological harmony. Consequently, according to this reading, it would seem to be the case that if eros is the desire for wholeness, then eros is the desire to return to the original hermaphroditic geometrical unity, order, and harmony echoed by the congruous and ordered primordial cosmos.

Eros seems to be a desire for wholeness on a variety of different spectrums of being. Because eros is a desire, it reminds us of our deficiency, our current state of dualism. While our imperfect human condition might seem pitiable to some, Aristophanes ends his speech with optimism; we *can* return to our original nature, our former holistic psychology, and we *can* be

¹³² I agree for the most part with Newell that the focus of Aristophanes' account of eros is the human longing for the good life or best mode of existence, a desire for wholeness. Further, I agree that a reconciliation of our fragmented nature might signal a rebirth and re-emergence of our original hubris, leading to renewed strife and chaos antithetical to the political body. However, I humbly disagree regarding Aristophanes' intended object of eros. What I propose is that Aristophanes' speech might suggest that the wholeness we pursue is a wholeness of an ontological grade infinitely higher than the unity with another human being, for we pursue the androgynous state of being itself. In other words, unity with our soulmate ultimately will not fulfill us, though we all may *think* such a unity will be satisfactory. This would explain Aristophanes' objection to Socrates' jabs (205d–206a, 212c)—Aristophanes feels slighted. However, Newell's reading does seem similar to my own when he says, "Sexual union aims most fundamentally to recover the androgynous unity of the circle-beings, not to replicate the existing halves." See Newell, *Passion*, 73–74.

¹³³ Consider the symbolism of the cicada in the myth of Tithonos. See Rose, *Greek Mythology*, 35. One might compare the idea of circlemen reproducing, the image of the cicada and its relationship to immortality, and compare it to the relationship of reproduction and immortality in the speech of Diotima.

happy. He says, “Love promises the greatest hope of all: if we treat the gods with due reverence, *he* [Love] will restore us to our *original* nature, and by healing us, he will make us blessed and happy” (193d).¹³⁴ Aristophanes’ statement at 193d also hints why the “wound” of our nature persists, recalling our initial fall due to hubris and impiety (190b–c); we did not and do not treat the gods with due reverence, we did not and do not give them adequate honour and respect, and we did not and do not esteem their authority. We are sacrilegious, and Aristophanes’ conclusion recalls our earlier discussion of impiety in the speech of Eryximachus and our analysis of the Aloadai.

Because we are not pious, we disregard the dictates and will of divine authority. Because we disregard the dictates and will of divine authority, we call into question the legitimacy of conventional and traditional authority, especially the paterfamilias. We question all authority. Once we call all authority into question, we question the traditionally unquestionable, and we thus question the concrete, resulting in the gradual alienation of ourselves from reality as traditionally understood, the consequence of which is the upset of the natural order, and hence the fall of man.¹³⁵ An answer to this problem, or so it would seem, is piety, or a pursuit of wholeness in a pious fashion; we must “encourage all men, therefore, to treat the gods, both conventional and natural, with all due reverence, so that we may escape this fate and find wholeness instead” (193a7–b2). If we are to be pious, and if we are to pursue wholeness, then we must philosophize in such a way that promotes harmony and unity among gods, men, nature, and conventions. For, we are told in *Euthyphro*, “What [the gods] give us is obvious to all. There is for us no good that we do not receive from them,” again calling to mind Eryximachus’ speech (*Euthphr.* 14e9–15a1, *Smp.* 188d4–8). Otherwise, if man overthrows piety and the dictates and will of divine authority, when man practices philosophy improperly, he widens the chasm between not only himself and the world around him, but he widens also the chasm within his very soul.¹³⁶

The solution to the problem of the gaping chasm and alienation between man and nature remains unknown. However, it would seem that filial piety, erotics, philosophy, and the wedding

¹³⁴ Emphasis mine.

¹³⁵ *Euthyphro* 3e–4e, 15d–e.

¹³⁶ One might consider why Socrates seems to suggest that only adult men and women can engage in dialectic in *Republic* 537c–e.

of the three are necessary conditions to solving the problem of man's fall. Philosophy and disdain for the gods and tradition spurned by ill-guided passion has brought about our fall. So too, perhaps philosophy, if done in a harmonious and guiding way, can help us climb out of darkness to our former condition. Alternatively, perhaps philosophy, the love of wisdom, if governed by love of the Uranian variety, at the very least can help us perform a "holding action."¹³⁷ To be both pious and philosophical simultaneously, one must practice philosophy piously. To piously practice philosophy, one must obey the desire of the gods, fulfilling the role the god sets out for us. To be erotic and pious, one must love the gods. Philosophy is necessarily erotic, for it is the love of wisdom, and thus the love of virtue. Because piety is a necessary condition for virtue, philosophy must accommodate the divine and traditional in some way while incorporating and satiating the erotic longing of the individual. Perhaps the harmony between all three, philosophy, piety, and eros, is at the core of the discussion of *Euthyphro*, a discussion of filial piety both terrestrial and divine.¹³⁸

Aristophanes gives us a clue about how to begin solving the problem of dualism. Following his call for piety, Aristophanes optimistically informs the party that, if we let Love "command" and guide us in all ways of life and become friendly to him, "then we shall find the young men that are meant for us and we will win their love" (193b). While this might seem like little more than hedonistic injection, Aristophanes goes on to explain the importance of both erotic love and pederastic relationships in the following paragraph:

I say there's *just one* way for the human race to flourish: we must bring love to its *perfect* conclusion, and each of us must win the favors of his very own young man, so that he can recover his original nature. If that is the ideal, then, of course, the nearest approach to it is best in present circumstances, and that is to win the favors of young men who are naturally sympathetic to us (193c).¹³⁹

This passage would suggest that the key to human flourishing and perfection lies in the fulfillment of erotic longing, and not *solely* on the terrestrial level. Verily, it would seem that the

¹³⁷ Julius Evola, *Ride the Tiger*, 3. Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, G.L. Ulmen, trans., (New York: Telos, 2003), 59–60, 87, 238.

¹³⁸ Plato might have something in mind when he has Socrates pose a question at 13e10–11 along with his reference to the myth of Daedalus at 11b9–e4, 15b6–c4. For further discussion, see Marc L. McPherran, "Socratic Piety in The Euthyphro," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 23, no. 2 (1985), 283–309; Doug Al-Maini, "Filial Piety in the Euthyphro," *Ancient Philosophy*, vol. 31 (2013), 1–24.

¹³⁹ Emphasis mine. It is worth noting that Aristophanes addresses this to both men *and* women.

fulfillment of erotic longing is the *only* way for man to transcend himself on the manifold of ontological planes. Winning the love of young men is a means, the first step, to greater forms of excellence. We thus recall the refined pederastic relationships outlined by Phaedrus and Pausanias, and they now take on a new meaning. As Aristophanes suggests earlier, the relationship between lovers is *not* about sex, but some kind of unity and harmony (192c). The erastes-eromenos relationships outlined by Phaedrus and Pausanias thus shift further away from their terrestrially sensual overtone toward something of higher ontological sublimity, particularly virtue and the ideal of the *καλὸς κἀγαθός*, and beyond. Aristophanes thus concludes that, if we cannot find our soul mates, then we must make the best of a bad situation and let Love draw us to what is naturally ours, winning the favours and attention of young men with natural sympathies towards us (193c).¹⁴⁰ One cannot help but call to mind Socrates' flowering philosophical polygamy.

Our discussion of Aristophanes now ends. I wish to leave the reader with an observation. Following our analysis, it would seem that practicing philosophy the right way—the ideal way—must satisfy the erotic longing in man's soul for the geometrical unity echoed by the harmonious cosmos. Likewise, philosophy must also redirect man's other erotic desires to worthy objects and allow him fulfill himself on various spectrums of being, while simultaneously revering the god and the gods. Put simply, philosophy might be the key, or one of the keys, to directing and fulfilling all of man's transcendental and terrestrial erotic desires within the boundaries of tradition, all of which he can pursue concurrently in a coherent fashion.¹⁴¹ Further, because human life seeks happiness and thus wholeness, and because the unexamined life is not a life worth living, philosophy is a necessary condition for happiness. What this ideal practice of philosophy might look like is a philosophical friendship similar to the relationships outlined by Phaedrus and Pausanias, supplemented by the concepts of Eryximachus and Aristophanes, and later by Diotima. Not only could such a relationship satiate the sublunary forms of erotic longing, but also if it were a genuine loving friendship, such a relationship can harness the power of erotic longing to ascend to the greatest heights, human and supranatural, of sublimity and excellence. Philosophy, and especially philosophy of the best variety, thus seems to be inherently

¹⁴⁰ One must keep in mind, however, that Aristophanes says treating the gods with due reverence, piety, is at the very least a necessary condition for Love to restore us to our original nature, thus making us blessed and happy.

¹⁴¹ This idea of synthesis would seem to be Empedocles' project. The ideas of Empedocles strongly influenced Plato. See Graham, *Fragments*, 328.

erotic, and this seems true of most things Platonic. We are now primed to hear the speeches of Agathon and Socrates, *masters of the art of love* (193e, 198d).

2.8 Agathon's Eros: A Lovely Narcissist

Like his predecessors Eryximachus and Aristophanes, Agathon presents a portion of his speech on Love from the perspective his craft, poetry. However, because Agathon's speech is a kind of balance of poetry and rhetoric, lightly grazing philosophical concepts that prepare us for the teaching of Diotima, it would perhaps be felicitous to compare Agathon's style and manner to that of the Greek sophists. In keeping with the sophists, Agathon's account of Love is not without his own self-interest in mind. Agathon, it would seem, creates and sculpts a new god partially in, and partial to, his own image. In other words, one could say that Agathon mythologizes a Love that would surely love Agathon.

Agathon criticizes his predecessors, and perhaps rightly so, for celebrating the gifts of Love rather than giving due praise to the god himself (194e). Agathon seeks to distinguish himself from his guests and peers by discussing Love's qualities, "what he is like," which Agathon considers the "only" correct method of praise (194e–195a). On whether or not Love, or any thing, *is* the aggregate of its qualities, and whether or not we can only know a thing as the aggregate of its qualities, I withhold assent for the time being (195a). Agathon proceeds with an inflammatory assertion: Love, *not* Zeus, is the happiest god, for he is the most beautiful and best (195a). He does provide reasons, however, for his coronation of Love as the most beautiful and best, reasons that reflect human experience to some degree. Consequently, we should not be hasty to disregard Agathon's descriptive speech of Love's character as mere poetic fluff. When reading Plato's dialogues, it is imperative, I think, to take into consideration as much of the text as possible and keep an open mind. Agathon lays before us again the glaring question at the heart of *Symposium* with an added touch: Who or what is Eros, and why, according to Agathon, is Eros the most beautiful and the best of the gods?

Agathon paints a youthful, exuberant, *virile* image of Eros. Love is the most beautiful of the gods, according to the poet (195a, 196a, 197c, e). Love is most beautiful, says Agathon, for four main reasons: Love is the most beautiful because he is the youngest, the most delicate, of a fluid and supple shape and nature, and because of the exquisite colouring of his skin (195a–b, 195d, 196a, 196a–b). Now, let us expand each point to fill out the poet's portrait of Love. Love

is beautiful because he is “the youngest of the gods and stays young forever,” living *only* among the young (178b–c, 195b–c). He is the most delicate of the gods because he will not walk on anything hard—not the earth or man’s skull, which is telling—but treads and makes his home *only* in the softest of places, the soul of a gentle character and perhaps the loins (195e–196a). Love is balanced, fluid, and of supple shape and nature because he is capable of enfolding a soul completely, often entering and leaving a soul without notice (196a).¹⁴² Lastly, the god is beautiful by virtue of his exquisite complexion, and the proof of his divine pelt is his relationship with flowers (a bit of playfulness), for his “place is wherever it is flowery and fragrant; there he settles, there he stays” (196a–b). Eros seems to be a very handsome god indeed.

With these four characteristics of Love’s great beauty, Agathon includes concomitant characteristics of Love. For example, because Love is young and pursues youth, Eros hates old age and flees from it (195b). This seems intuitively true, for old men, such as Cephalus, tend to lack the impetuosity and eroticism of the young—they have difficulty standing to attention for Love’s bugle call. Because love is delicate, he wants nothing to do with souls or bodies of harsh character (196a–b). Because Eros has a balanced, fluid, and supple shape and character, he is repelled by ugliness and forever at war with the ugly (196a). Finally, as consequence of his flowery complexion, Love “never settles in anything, be it a body or a soul, that cannot flower or has lost its bloom” (196b). Agathon’s image of Love would seem to take the form of a supple young man, a young man who likewise seeks supple souls with supple bodies in their physical and intellectual bloom. Curiously, this culmination of Love’s characteristics seemingly leads to a depiction of Eros that rules out the other speakers from his blessings, Socrates especially. The only candidate for discipleship of Agathon’s Eros is Agathon himself. Agathon’s Eros loves Agathon.

Agathon’s speech portrays Love, like the speeches of Phaedrus and Aristophanes, as unified. Contrary to Pausanias and Eryximachus, Agathon does not allow for a dualism of Eros. One of the most important distinctions that Agathon makes is his restriction of the name ‘Love’ solely to the harmonizing, reconciliatory, *Uranian* force. To that which Pausanias and Eryximachus describe as love of the vulgar variety, the Polyhymnian type, Agathon relegates to a new title, ‘Necessity.’ Necessity is the source of disunity and disharmony, a force antithetical

¹⁴² Consider how quickly emotions change in juvenile relationships.

to love synonymous with decay and ugliness, and between the two antithetical forces there is “unceasing war” (195c, 196a, 197b). Such a distinction, therefore, seemingly altogether rules out ‘bad eros as an instantiation of love.

With this image of Love as a purely beneficent and harmonizing, though narcissistic or perhaps reflexive, force, it does not seem so bizarre that Agathon would associate Love with the four classical virtues. Agathon’s association of Eros and erotic energy with virtue might be justifiable; his account of the relationship between eros and virtue, however, may be in many ways more clever and mischievous than profound. For instance, Agathon says that Love can neither do nor suffer either harm or evil; violence has no place within the domain of Love (196b–c). If violence has no share in love, then “every service we give to love we give willingly” (196c). It follows, according to Agathon, that “whatever one person agrees on with another, when both are willing, that is right and just;” Love thus has some share in justice (196c). Nevertheless, Agathon then turns cheeky. Love, according to Agathon, has the biggest share of moderation second only to justice (196c). Agathon presents his argument like a real sophist, a Gorgias, Euthydemus, or Dionysodorus: If moderation is power over pleasures and passions, and if Love is the most powerful pleasure, then Love is necessarily moderate, for he has power over pleasures and passions due to their subordinate strength (196c).¹⁴³ From this shaky conclusion, Agathon forwards the idea that Love is the most courageous of the gods, for he has a hold on Ares, love overpowers the war god, exemplified in the Net of Hephaestus (196d).¹⁴⁴ Love now shares in three of the four virtues, justice, moderation, and courage, according to Agathon.

What remains is wisdom. Nehamas and Woodruff note that Agathon treats wisdom, σοφία, as a rough equivalent to craft or technical skill, τέχνη.¹⁴⁵ Further, Agathon insists that he must make an effort “not [to] leave out anything that can be said” on the relationship between love and wisdom, which would hint its importance (196d–e). Now Agathon’s speech becomes a discussion of love from the perspective of craft, Agathon deliberately evoking and emulating the speech of Eryximachus (186b, 196e). He tells the party and reader that “the god [Love] is so skilled a poet that he can make others into poets: once Love touches him, *anyone* becomes a

¹⁴³ In other words, because Love is the most powerful passion, all other passions and pleasures are weaker. Because they are weaker than he is, they are thus under or subservient to the power of love. As the most powerful passion, love has power over pleasure and passions, thus fulfilling the definition of moderation set out by Agathon.

¹⁴⁴ See *Odyssey* VIII.266–366.

¹⁴⁵ Plato, *Complete Works*, 479 n. 26.

poet” (196e). Alternatively, one could read the sentence to say that Love is a composer and he is the cause of composing in everyone.¹⁴⁶ Love is so wise-skilled a poet, maker, or composer, a ποιητής, that he makes or is the cause of poetry, making, or composition, or simply *production*, ποιέω or ποίησις, in others, *anyone* he touches (196e).¹⁴⁷ Because Love imprints poeisis in others, Agathon thus infers that Love is necessarily good at *every* kind of artistic production or “composition that has to do with music,” μουσική¹⁴⁸ (196e).¹⁴⁹ Mousike is any art over which the Muses preside, and this includes literature, science, the arts, especially poetry, mythmaking, or anything that produces harmony.¹⁵⁰ Love could not pass on to others poeisis if he himself did not possess it, nor could he teach what he knows not, further emphasizing the relationship between Love and craft-knowledge. Love, it would seem, has been weaving his own account within the dialogue, especially from the speech of Eryximachus onward.

Such a reading of Agathon’s speech smoothly transitions us into the next section, his examination of artisans and professionals (197a–b). His argument, it would seem, is that Love is the fountainhead—the source—of art *and* wisdom, craft-wisdom. Anyone who has Love for a teacher “ends up in the light of fame, while a man untouched by Love ends in obscurity” (197a). Whether the wisdom or craft-wisdom that Love imparts to us is synonymous with knowledge or craft-knowledge remains unclear. However, the text would suggest that Love does impart knowledge, and that virtue can be taught. Let us examine the first point, that Love imparts knowledge. (A) Agathon tells us that Love is a good composer or poet (poetes) in every kind of artistic production and composition that has to do with mousike (196e). (B) Agathon also tells the party that Love is a teacher and that teachers cannot teach what they do not know (196e–197a), or alternatively that a teacher can only teach what he knows. (C) Necessarily, if one knows something, then the knower must possess knowledge of that which he knows. The argument then follows that Love possesses knowledge, which he graciously teaches and imparts

¹⁴⁶ <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0174%3Atext%3DSym.%3Asection%3D196e>.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ The generative processes of animal sexuality fall within the domain of Love’s productivity as well (197a).

¹⁴⁹ <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0174%3Atext%3DSym.%3Asection%3D196e>.

¹⁵⁰ <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=mousikh%2Fn&la=greek&can=mousikh%2Fn0&prior=kata&d=Perseus:text:1999.01.0173:text=Sym.:section=196e&i=1#lexicon>.

to his students, or, at the very least, that Love guides his students toward knowledge.¹⁵¹ Now to the second point, that wisdom and virtue can be taught. If wisdom is a virtue, and if wisdom is synonymous with *techne*, then it would seem that virtue is a *techne*. If Love can teach crafts, and if virtue is a craft, then Love can teach virtue. Virtue, on this model, can thus be taught. Worth consideration is the nature of philosophy—the love of wisdom—as a craft, specifically the ambiguity of whether philosophy is the love of wisdom or Love’s wisdom. Worth especial consideration, however, is the relationship between love and the kingly, political craft “the governance of gods and men” (197b).

We can express the core idea of Agathon’s speech about love in the simple maxim “like is always drawn to like” (195b). Love is beautiful and harmonious, and love thus pursues that which is like itself, beauty and harmony, necessarily shunning discord and ugliness (195a, 196a, 197c, e). Because Love pursues the beautiful, and because Love is himself a great beauty, Love’s love is reflexive, and he is thus a narcissist in the full sense of the term. Perhaps he is a narcissist insofar as he loves and seeks the harmony within himself (R. 592a–b). Like Narcissus, Love gravitates to all things beautiful, and he, being the most beautiful of the gods (Smp. 195a), necessarily gravitates toward himself. Love seeks to perpetuate himself and beauty in the world. As proof of Love’s reflexive and narcissistic character, and his desire to perpetuate himself, consider how Love imparts to us the greatest gifts known to man, the arts, virtue, and knowledge, “all goods” (197c). Consider also, for further proof of Love’s reflexivity and narcissism, how it is *through* us and with his guidance that the arts, virtue, and knowledge, become manifest, and subsequently so too are goods by-product of his guidance and a reflection of his beautiful, harmonizing character. Very similar to the speech of Eryximachus (186b, 187a), Agathon’s account of Love would suggest that we are a medium through which Love perpetuate his own harmonizing Uranian character, our crafts and their products merely an image of the beautiful harmony toward which Love ceaselessly strives and of which he is naturally a part and owns a share. For this reason, Love is reflexive and thus a narcissist.

Agathon’s speech concludes with a sudden burst poetic inspiration, a “need to say something in poetic meter” (197c). Recalling our earlier observations, that Love’s touch is the causes of poesis, especially composition that has to do with the arts of *mousike* such as poetry,

¹⁵¹ $P(A, B, C) \rightarrow Q, P \vdash Q$

this literary device might stand as an example of Love's creative and arbitrary power, perhaps suggesting that the god now charms Agathon's soul. This image of Agathon's inspiration and subsequent creation of poetical prose reinforces our reading of Love as the narcissistic wellspring of all human creativity; for the poet's sudden breathing in and exhalation of poetry, as well of his description of the creative processes altogether, evokes imagery of Socrates' metaphor of the magnetic stone on a grand scale (Ion 533d–534b). Regardless, and I am repeating myself, what would seem to be the crux of Agathon's speech—the key transition point—is the idea that Eros fills us with himself and his own love of beauty, compelling us toward harmony and the beautiful, of which Eros owns a share, priming us for the teachings of Diotima. We should submit ourselves to Eros, we should “join with him in the song he sings that *charms* the mind of god and man,” according to Agathon, because Love “is the most beautiful leader and the best,” a leader that inspires in us his own love of beauty (Smp. 197e).¹⁵²

Worth consideration is that a theoretical consequence of our reading is that Agathon's speech is an elementary attempt to bridge and reconcile the divide between love, virtue, craft, and knowledge, or at the very least suggest a strong interrelationship between the four. We must keep in mind, however, that Agathon characterizes his own speech as “part of it in fun, part of it moderately serious” (198a). As to which parts are mischief and which are serious, I leave open to interpretation, though Agathon himself boyishly confesses that he was talking when he should have been listening (201c).

The positioning necessary to begin a discussion of Socrates' speech is a delicate affair. The popular approach to Socrates' speech is to interpret his deliverance as a sort of philosophical culmination and apex of *Symposium*. We read Socrates' speech as the authoritative account of eros. Socrates' speaking forth thus has sweeping consequences for the dialogue and Platonic philosophy and psychology, as we understand them. A comprehensive delineation of the meaning of Socrates' speech and its philosophical implications for the others speeches, the dialogue, and Platonic philosophy as a whole, is beyond the scope of this project. In fact, it could take years, or possibly a lifetime to unravel, fully grasp, and practice the erotic mysteries of Plato's Socrates. This might be Plato's intention. With the gravity of Socrates' speech in mind, let me frankly say that, when it comes to the question of Plato's precise authorial intent

¹⁵² Emphasis mine.

concerning Socrates' speech and initiation into Diotima's mysteries, I do not have the answer. At best, I can speculate—I never profess anything otherwise—and this stands true for the Platonic philosophy altogether. Regardless, because Socrates' speech weighs so heavily and serves as the lynchpin of the dialogue, I think it expressly important and apposite to employ my eclectic method in the proceeding section. I will thus lean especially on the expertise and guidance of those initiates who sought to unravel the mysteries of Socrates and Diotima before me, choosing the arguments and observations that seems to me the best and most persuasive as we continue our pursuit of Eros.

Chapter 3: The Wily Hunter and the Mystagogue from Mantinea

3.1 Introduction

Socrates' speech brings the dialogue to an erotic climax worthy of "loud applause" (212c). His speech is in many ways the perceived denouement of an extraordinarily rich dialogue about Eros, a dialogue with various arguments about Love and its various relationships with the human things, the inhuman things, and the cosmos. While the preceding speeches possess philosophic content, the dramatic setting of the dialogue positions Socrates' speech, and Socrates' speech positions itself, as *the* speech about Eros from the perspective of philosophy. The concern of philosophy is the study of the fundamental nature of things. To study the fundamental nature of things is to study essences. The study of essences is in some sense the study of being. Therefore, if the concern of philosophy is the study of the fundamental nature of things, the concern of philosophy is the study of being. Specifically, the concern of philosophy seems to be the study of being and what is true about being, its truths. If the topic at hand is eros, and if philosophy tasks itself with investigating the fundamental nature of things, then to philosophize about eros is to put forth a rational account of the essence of eros. Phrased differently, to philosophize about love is to investigate the quiddity of eros and its relationship to being.

The philosophic pursuit of Eros might characterize Socrates' speech more than any speech of the preceding speakers. However, what constitutes a philosophic pursuit depends on how one understands philosophy as a method of enquiry. For instance, if two necessary conditions for philosophizing are (A) logical arguments in propositional form and (B) the pursuit of essence, then one can say that Socrates' speech is the most philosophic speech of the dialogue. However, if we call into question the first condition of philosophy, (A), and if we specifically question what constitutes an argument, perhaps suggesting the possibility of the propositional content of images, analogies, metaphors, and so on, it would seem that the domain of philosophy is far more inclusive—though Socrates still wears the ribbon in *Symposium* (213e). This would mean that analytics does not hold monopoly over the pursuit of the fundamental nature of things, philosophy. With this idea in mind, we might perhaps read Socrates' assertion at 199b in a new light: "I'd like to tell you the truth *my way* ... You will hear the truth about Love."¹⁵³ Though Socrates does refute some of the propositions of earlier speeches, he does not altogether reject

¹⁵³ Emphasis mine.

the ideas of his predecessors, nor does he profess to possess *the* unequivocal truth about Eros. Moreover, let us recall that Socrates himself employs a great variety of analogies, metaphors, and myths to make his point, and that all of these devices ultimately stem from Plato.

Given the dramatic importance of Socrates' character, along with his claims to know the art of love, a claim that insinuates that Socrates possess at least *some* knowledge of what eros is or at the very least how one ought to employ eros (177e, 193e), Socrates positions himself in some ways as an authority on love. Naturally, for these reasons many scholars treat Socrates' speech or speeches as the quintessentially Platonic position, although this approach seems to be waning in popularity.¹⁵⁴ Of the speeches that compose *Symposium*, however, the meaning and significance of the Socrates-Diotima speech is the most contested in the Platonic literature. There is a manifold of interpretations of Socrates' speech, and the literature about the speech is rife with disagreement. So how are we approach Socrates' eros if there is so little agreement about its nature and its object? Delicately and carefully seems to be the answer, and yet our search may not be conclusive.

3.2 A Basis for Socrates

Let us begin by examining how Socrates positions his own speech. As Agathon's praise of Love concludes with 'burst of applause,' Socrates seems to feign his reluctance to speak (198a). I say that Socrates apparently feigns his reluctance to speak because, as most of us recognize from other dialogues, Socrates never seems to have a shortage of words. For this reason, we sympathize with Eryximachus' reaction to Socrates' alleged reluctance and fear to speak; "But you, tongue-tied? No, I don't believe that" (198b). We are inclined to believe that Socrates is being ironic or sarcastic about his unease. But what if Socrates is being honest when he suggests that he is afraid (194a1–4, 198a5–8)? What kind of implications does this have for his account of eros?

Let us briefly consider Socrates' statements, 191a and 198a respectively. At 191a, Socrates bluntly tells Eryximachus that he is afraid to speak after Agathon; "if you ever get in my position, or rather the position I'll be in after Agathon's spoken so well, then you'll really be

¹⁵⁴ For example, see Obdrzalek, *Transformation*, 415, 415n.1, though she seems to switch gears at 424 n.20 and 424 n.21; F. C. White, "Beauty of Soul and Speech in Plato's *Symposium*," *Classical Quarterly*, vol. 58, no.1 (2008), 69, 69 n.1; See F. C. White, "Virtue in Plato's *Symposium*," *Classical Quarterly*, vol. 54, no. 2 (2004), 366 n.2 for further citations.

afraid. You'll be at your wit's end, as I am now."¹⁵⁵ After Agathon's beautiful speech and its boisterous reception, a speech which Socrates describes as "amazing" (198a), Socrates asks Eryximachus a question: "Now do you think I was foolish to feel the fear I felt before?" (198a).¹⁵⁶ Although we tend to read Socrates as a bit of a flippant albeit good natured rascal, I see no reason not to entertain the notion that Socrates might be genuinely afraid.¹⁵⁷

Before turning to the implications that fear might have for Socrates' speech and what it might signify, let us consider why Socrates would be afraid. He is certainly unafraid of public speaking, even when his own life is on the line. Besides, people he might consider friends surround him within Agathon's home, or at the very least people of amicable disposition toward him. Is it not strange then that the man whose virtue Alcibiades sings high praises, singling out Socrates' courage especially (216d, 216e–217a, 219c, 219d, 220b, 221b, 221b), the man who eventually states that courage is the most praiseworthy quality of Eros (212b), and the described master and self-proclaimed knower of the art of love (177d–e, 193e, 198d), is getting weak at the knees over giving a speech on Love to a drunk audience?¹⁵⁸ For these reasons, we are inclined to read Socrates' admission of fear as an expression of irony. However, we can speculate an honest reason why Socrates might be afraid to speak; not necessarily because he shares Aristophanes' worry that "he "might say something ridiculous" (189b), but because Socrates will speak in such a way that will influence and shape the souls of others, thus altering their understanding of who they are and how they ought to live. As any teacher will attest, authentic education or rather 'soul-crafting' is a delicate and dangerous process that can yield unsavory ramifications.

Let us now turn to the implications that Socrates' fear may have for his account of eros. According to *Laches*, fear seems to be the anticipation and expectation of some future evil (Lch.

¹⁵⁵ Benardete translates the passage, "but if you were where I am now, or rather where I shall be when Agathon has spoken well, then you would really be *wholly afraid* and baffled as I am now." Emphasis mine. R. G. Bury translates the section as, "but if you could be where I am now—or rather, I should say, where I shall be when Agathon has spoken—you would be fitly and sorely afraid, and would be as hard put to it as I am." See <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Plat.+Sym.+194a&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0174>.

¹⁵⁶ The translations of Benardete and Bury especially suggest that Socrates is *still* afraid. Benardete translates the passage as, "is it your opinion that my long-standing fear was groundless [?]" Bury translates the passage as, "do you really call it an unfeared fear that has all this while affrighted me [?]" See, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0174%3Atext%3DSym.%3Asection%3D198a>.

¹⁵⁷ That Socrates seems to be afraid is better emphasized in the translations of Benardete and Bury. See the two previous notes.

¹⁵⁸ White, *Virtue*, 372 n.27, 375, 375 n.43. Also consider Laches praise of Socrates for his conduct at the retreat from Delium at *Laches* 181b2–5, 189b.

198b). However, if fear is the anticipation and expectation of some future evil, then fear presupposes a subject with some kind of notion or understanding of what is to be feared and not feared. Underlying a notion or understanding of what is to be feared and not feared is some kind of notion or understanding of what is good and what is bad. In the best case, we do not have opinions, but we *know* what is worth fearing. However, if we know something is worth fearing, then we must know that something is truly bad. If we know something is truly bad, then we must know what bad is, and if we know what bad is, then we know what good is as well. It would seem that genuine fear presupposes knowledge of good and evil. If Socrates is truly afraid, then not only does he possess knowledge of what is truly good and bad, but his fear signifies the potentiality for a genuine evil.

Socrates might be afraid for a variety of reasons, if he is afraid at all. *If Socrates is genuinely afraid, then he must anticipate one or more legitimate evils.* My own speculation is that Socrates anticipates the potential of two legitimate evils, and that Socrates thus finds himself on the horns of a moral dilemma. On the one hand, it is immoral for Socrates to allow his companions to proceed in ignorance concerning the matters of love, the art of which he professes to possess knowledge (Smp. 177e). On the other hand, as I touch on above, by sharing his knowledge of the art of love Socrates thereby attempts to wash his companions of their ignorance. By putting forth a speech to cleanse his friends of ignorance, Socrates in some sense takes on the role of educator. But in assuming this role, Socrates not only attempts to fill his friends' minds with knowledge of love. Socrates also employs rhetoric, and by *commending* the rites of Love to his friends, Socrates makes an effort to *persuade* them of Diotimas' teaching, and he tries to persuade them and lead them away by encouraging them to turn away from what they believe and adopt a new way of life, philosophy (212b–c). Socrates is the ἀποκομιστής (apokomistes, the one who leads) that ἀπάγε (apage, leading away) for the purposes of encouraging μεταστρέφειν (metastephein, turning around) and ἀνακύκλειν (anakuklein, turning around in one's mind).¹⁵⁹ Socrates is trying to mould and direct souls, a practice that can backfire in catastrophic ways.

From this perspective, Socrates has to weigh two evils, and he has to make a choice. Will he run away, or will he man his post and prudently endure the risk of the lesser evil in order to

¹⁵⁹ See Newell, *Passion*, 85 for similar observation.

avoid greater evil (Lch. 190e, 192c-d)? As we know, Socrates *does* speak forth—although, it is unclear whether Socrates is honestly recounting what he knows about love and how he has come to know it or whether he is shrewdly masking his own speech in the voice of Diotima for a number of possible reasons. Regardless, and to the point of this brief digression, Socrates ultimately seems to overcome his fear, speaks forth, and runs the risk. He musters up enough courage to tell his version of the truth about eros (Smp. 199a–b). This recalls Socrates’ claim at 212b, that courage is the most praiseworthy quality of Eros. This is where I wish to leave the reader with a hypothetical: If courage is necessary for Socrates’ speech, then the dramatic setting would suggest that courage is a necessary condition and perhaps the basis for philosophy. Moreover, there seems to be something true about this observation, for the courage necessary for philosophy strikes me as the courage to tell the truth and expose falsehood, regardless of how misshapen and irregular the presentation of the ideas might be (221d–222a). Philosophy requires courage only if it is truly a conversation.

Such a reading seriously calls the nature of philosophy into question. If courage is a necessary condition or perhaps the basis for philosophy, what is the fundamental basis of courage? Is eros the foundation of courage? Is thumos the foundation of courage? Is the foundation of courage perhaps a mix of both eros and thumos? If the basis of philosophy is courage, what is the relationship of eros and thumos to philosophy, and what consequence does this have for our understanding of Socrates’ speech? I leave the reader to ponder these questions, for the answer necessarily informs the dialogue’s presentation of philosophy and its guiding psychological trait, potentially undermining the idea of eros as the basis for philosophy and education.¹⁶⁰ However, if what Alcibiades says is true at 216e, then perhaps this brief excursion is not worth serious consideration.

While the thematic positioning of Socrates’ speech and its content strongly suggests a sort of ontological apex of the dialogue, what I sought to illustrate in the preceding section is that

¹⁶⁰ Paul O’Mahoney argues that eros cannot be the foundation for education or philosophy following a close reading of *Symposium*. However, while O’Mahoney presents a fascinating argument to support his claim, the silence of Aristodemus, I do not find his argument altogether persuasive, for the crux of his argument leans almost entirely on how one interprets a literary device. See Paul O’Mahoney, *Hiccup Episode*, 151–154. Alternatively, Newell makes a convincing argument that eros can explain thumos, but the reverse is simply not true. Thumos is the ambiguous expression of the failure of eros to fulfill its longing, and eros plays a salient role in philosophy and the fulfillment of human life. See Newell, *Ruling Passion*, 2, 3, 3 n.7, 4, 62–63, 71–72, 79–81, 83, 104–105, 128. Also consider Christina Tarnopolsky, “Thumos and Rationality in Plato’s Republic,” *Global Discourse*, vol. 5, no. 2 (2015), 242–257.

Socrates' speech is not without some ambiguity and room for potential radical interpretation. In fact, the Socrates-Diotima speech is so rich, so philosophically and literarily pregnant, that one could dedicate an entire book to its analysis, becoming blissfully lost as one sets sail on the vast ocean of secondary literature discussing the mysteries of love. Therefore, for the purposes of this project, I am going to limit myself to the examination of but three principal aspects of the Socrates-Diotima speech. The first topic I wish to discuss is the Socrates-Diotima image of eros, and how this image of eros is a reflection of Socrates or perhaps the inverse. Second, I wish to briefly discuss Diotima's mysteries of love and what Diotiman Eros might tell us about eros more generally. Third, I wish to draw some connections between Socrates' speech and those of his predecessors before moving on to our final comments on Plato's depiction of eros in *Symposium*.

3.3 The Image of a Wily Hunter

Like Agathon, Socrates mythologizes an image of Eros that reflects his own character. But he does not begin painting his image of Eros before prodding Agathon and his speech in a playful manner (198b). While Socrates acknowledges that Agathon's speech was indeed beautiful (198b, 199a, 199d, 201c), Socrates puns off Agathon's speaking like Gorgias in the paralyzing manner of a sophist (198c–d). In other words, Socrates accuses Agathon of employing honeyed speech. Although Agathon's speech about Eros is delightful and alluring, his words might miss the mark of what is true, calling to mind the sweet talk of a fickle lover. What Socrates wants is to tell the truth about love, that the truth "should be your basis" and that the speaker, or perhaps the reader, should "select the most beautiful truths and arrange them most suitably" (198d). This is not to say that the previous speeches are devoid of truth. Rather, Plato might suggest that there is a tangle of rhetoric, honeyed speech, and truth present to a greater degree in the previous speeches and to a lesser degree in the speech of Socrates. Given that philosophy is itself a form of rhetoric in a sense, I remain skeptical that the Socrates-Diotima speech gives us the be-all-end-all answer to the question of eros in the Platonic philosophy. After all, in Socrates' own words, "It is not hard at all to contradict Socrates" (201c). "

Socrates begins having his way with Agathon in the manner of a flirtatious lover, seeking Phaedrus' permission to "ask Agathon a few little questions" (199b–c). Socrates acknowledges that Agathon was on the right path when he suggested that "one should first show the qualities of

Love himself, and only then those of his deeds,” and Socrates certainly continues with Agathon’s idea of a relationship between Eros and beauty (199c). Through elenchus, Socrates makes an effort to establish the phenomenological foundations of eros. Their elenchus proceeds as follows:

1. For all x , if x loves, then there is a y that x loves y . (199d, 199e, Agreed 200a)
2. For all x and all y , if x desires and loves y at $t1$, then x does not possess y at $t1$. (200a; Agreed, 200a–200b)
3. For all x and all y , if x desires y , then x lacks y . (Agreed, 200a–b, 200e)
4. For all x and all y , if x possesses y , then x cannot desire y . (Agreed, 200b; from 3 contraposition)
5. For all x and all y , if x desires to possess y and x already possesses y at $t1$, then x desires to possess y at $t1$ and x desires to possess y at $t\infty$. (Agreed, 200b–e; from 2, 4)
6. For all x and all y , if x has y , x does not love y . (200e–201a; from 2, 4)
7. For all x and all y , if x loves y , then y is beautiful. (Agreed, 201a–b, 197b)
8. For all x and all y , if x loves y , then x lacks beauty. (Agreed, 201b)
9. For all x , if x lacks beauty, then x is not beautiful. (Agreed, 201b)
10. For all x , if x loves, then x is not beautiful. (Agreed, 201b; from 1, 8, 9)
11. For all y , if y is a good, then y is beautiful. (Agreed, 201c)¹⁶¹
12. For all x and all y and all z , if y is beautiful, and if z is good, and if $y \leftrightarrow z$, then x desires both y and z . (Agreed, 201c; from 7, 11)¹⁶²

That Plato understood his ideas in such reductionist terms is extraordinarily unlikely. However, this notation makes it easy to see the propositions that compose Socrates’ foundation of eros. Love presupposes a subject and an object, a lover and a thing loved. Love is some kind of force of attraction of the lover to thing loved, a force stemming from some lack within the soul of the

¹⁶¹ A thing is beautiful insofar as it is beautiful and it is good insofar as it is beautiful. A thing is good insofar as it is good and it is beautiful insofar as it is good. We can see a distinct, albeit necessary, relationship between the beautiful and the good. See the preceding note. Though I come to discuss this relationship below and its consequences for the Socrates-Diotima account of eros,

¹⁶² Differing from Nussbaum, *Fragility*, 177. As a note, the material equivalence used in 12 does *not* signify that the good and the beautiful are the same thing qua thing, or even that they are necessarily interchangeable, but that there cannot be the presence of one without the other, another example being color and shape. See White, *Beauty*, 71, 71 n.12. Concerning analytic philosophy, I agree with Newell, *Passion*, 125. Also, Julia Annas, “Plato’s Myths of Judgment,” *Phronesis*, vol. 27, n.2, 119.

lover. Altogether, Socrates and Agathon's discussion suggests that love is a type of desire that stems from a lack and a subsequent need to possess good and beautiful things now and to continue to possess them into the indefinite future. The notation also introduces adjacent topics for enquiry, such as the concepts of loving what one already possesses, desiring and loving indefinitely, and the relationship between good and beauty. Further, and of especial importance, the notation highlights a number of phenomenological problems inherent to a philosophical discussion of eros, problems which we discuss in our final considerations

At 201d, Socrates introduces Diotima, a mysterious seer and soothsayer from Mantinea who taught Socrates the art of love.¹⁶³ Socrates tells Agathon that he was on the right path before, when he asserted that “one should first describe who Love is and what he is like, and afterwards describe his works” (194e–195a, 201d–e). In fact, the discussion between Agathon and Socrates was almost analogous to the discussion between Socrates and Diotima, proceeding in a similar fashion—Socrates suggests that he, like Agathon, thought something along the lines that Love was beautiful and loved beautiful things, and he too was refuted by Diotima just as Agathon was refuted by Socrates (201e). The stunning conclusion of this refutation, a conclusion stemming from the propositions outlined above, is that Love is *neither* beautiful nor good—otherwise Love would not desire and love good and beautiful things or those qualities themselves (201e).¹⁶⁴ Because elenchus generally proceeds propositionally, and because propositional logic often can (and often does) encourage a kind of dichotomous way of thinking in and about the world (P \vee Q), if Socrates and Agathon's elenchus concludes that Love is neither beautiful nor good (\neg P), the unthinking knee-jerk reaction is that Love must be the opposite, bad and ugly (Q) (201e).

¹⁶³ Socrates says at 206b that he is Diotima's student, “filled with admiration” for her wisdom. Why might Plato have Socrates praise Love through the recollected speech of a woman and a mystagogue in a setting otherwise dominated by the hyper-masculine and homosexual? One reason might be that Diotima and her rites are symbolic of Demeter and the Elusinian mysteries, calling into question the conventional notions of hierarchy in Athenian society. See Nancy Evans, “Diotima and Demeter as Mystagogues in Plato's *Symposium*,” *Hypatia*, vol. 21, no. 2, (2006), 2. Another reason might be that Socrates seeks to “metaphorically dampen” the hyper-masculine, virile, polemical, and thereby domineering character of love in the preceding speeches by highlighting the nurturing aspects of erotic relationships founded on mutual devotion to a noble purpose. See Newell, *Passion*, 78–79. Or, perhaps, Diotima is meant to be a combination by Plato, complementing the experiences of Socrates and generalizing pregnancy between men and women. See Zuckert, *Philosophers*, 190–191. Alternatively, Socrates might be following Aristophanes' lead with hermaphroditic symbolism, superimposing the masculine and feminine elements of love to create an erotic image of neutral or epicene (*ἐπίκοιτος*) striving.

¹⁶⁴ Something about this assertion strikes me as counter intuitive. Beautiful people still desire other beautiful people. Wedgwood notices the same issue. See Wedgwood, *Eudaimonism*, 299 n3.

Diotima slams this polarized way of thinking as a false dichotomy, perhaps highlighting the shortcomings of an excessively analytic way of thinking that might be characteristic of the young Socrates and his interest in natural philosophy. According to Diotima, it does not follow that Love is ugly and bad because it is neither beautiful nor good. Instead, a third position might be a live alternative. If Love is neither good nor beautiful, perhaps Love is neither bad nor ugly. Instead, Diotima suggests that Love, and subsequently eros, like many things, is “in between” this set of poles, attributing to Eros and eros neutral characteristics (202d). However, because Socrates’ initial line of enquiry leaves (Q) as a live premise—that it could still follow from (\neg P) that Love is ugly and bad—Diotima must show that Socrates’ dichotomy is indeed a false one. In other words, to undermine Socrates’ argument that suggests a sort of proto-Manichean ontology—an argument which Socrates admits he finds persuasive (202a)—Diotima must introduce an ontology of her own that breaks down the dichotomous binary of Socrates’ view.¹⁶⁵ What Diotima seeks to do, and what she must do to thwart an argument leading to the calcified heart of the strict ascetic life is introduce a gradient of being, specifically a gradient that allows for a ‘divide,’ a sort of neutral domain or point between the poles of existence and opposing qualities. Diotima must therefore introduce an ontology that not only persuades Socrates, but also Plato’s readers, if anyone is to take her teaching seriously.

To cash out her argument, Diotima turns to epistemology. Following Socrates conviction that Love must be bad and ugly from the preceding argument (202a), Diotima asks Socrates a pivotal question: “if a thing’s not wise, it’s ignorant? Or haven’t you found out yet that there’s something in between wisdom and ignorance?” (202a). The question is pivotal because epistemology presupposes ontology. Any account of knowledge is nonsensical without some understanding or conviction about being. Any account of knowledge is nonsensical without some understanding or conviction about being because the very act of knowing presupposes the being of knower, thing known, and the relational process between knower and thing known titled ‘knowing.’ Said differently, in order to engage in epistemology, one must have some conviction about what can be said to exist and how to differentiate between different things that exist and different ways that things exist, otherwise knowledge has no basis—epistemology and ontology

¹⁶⁵ Zuckert makes a similar observation. See Zuckert, *Philosophers*, 13, 24, 192.

are intertwined. With these distinctions in mind, we can proceed to Diotima's assertion of what lies in between wisdom and ignorance:

“It's judging things correctly without being able to give a reason. Surely you see that this is not the same as knowing—for how could knowledge be unreasoning? And it's not ignorance either—for how could what hits the truth be ignorance? Correct judgment, of course, has this character: it is *in between* understanding and ignorance.”

“True,” said I, “as you say.” (202a–b)

Diotima makes a subtle move. If Socrates and the reader accept Diotima's first and following epistemological premises, that there is something in between wisdom and ignorance known as true opinion, then Diotima has persuaded both Socrates and the reader to do two things. On the one hand, Diotima persuades Socrates and the reader to abandon the former dichotomous premise; Q becomes $\neg Q$. On the other hand, Diotima persuades Socrates and the reader to abandon the former dichotomous ontology and adopt a broader ontology, or at the very least be open to a broader ontology, which de facto allows Diotima to forward her argument for the neutrality of Love and eros with relative ease.¹⁶⁶ We already see this transition at 202b, when Diotima tells Socrates not to “force whatever is not beautiful to be ugly, or whatever is not good to be bad,” and so too with Love: “he [Love] *could* be something in between.”¹⁶⁷

From the introduction of the ‘in between,’ Diotima seeks to forward the premise that Eros is neither a god nor a mortal, but a spirit or power (202b–e). If all gods are beautiful and happy, and if by happy we mean that one possesses good and beautiful things, then Love is neither a god nor happy, for Socrates and Diotima agreed that Love lacks and desires good and beautiful things. However, following the rejection of dichotomous absolutism at 202b and the acceptance of the hypothetical that there might be something in between knowledge and ignorance at 202a, Diotima is able to forward the argument that Love is in between immortality and mortality with little to no objection on the behalf of Socrates. She is able to do this so easily because Socrates

¹⁶⁶ Alternatively, if we are going to be specific, *Plato*, in a very simple move, persuades his readers to be open to an ontology that allows Diotima to prove her point.

¹⁶⁷ Emphasis mine. Worthy of note is that Socrates' ‘truth’ about Love relies very heavily on both a hypothesis and whether or not one is willing to accept the ontological model Diotima puts forth. It would seem that neither Socrates nor Diotima are telling the unequivocal truth, and they are both aware that they are not telling the unequivocal truth, thus reinforcing the speculative character of Platonic philosophy.

agreed to the broader ontological model and gradient of being.¹⁶⁸ Concisely, by accepting Diotima's epistemological and ontological distinction (202a), by employing the agreed premises of the preceding argument (specifically propositions 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, and 10), and by agreeing that Love cannot be a god for he lacks and desires beauty and happiness, Diotima forwards the premise that Eros is neither a god nor mortal, but a spirit or power (202d–e). Love is 'in between,' neutral, a δαίμων (*daimon*), a being or power of *the divide*.

Now that Diotima has established that Love is a *daimon*, Socrates desires to fill his insatiable curiosity and insists that she explain Love's function and lineage (202e, 203b). In both lines of enquiry, Diotima makes an effort to reinforce and justify her assertion that Eros is a *daimon*. By doing so, she fills in a picture of Eros that looks devilishly similar to our favorite gadfly. Whether or not Socrates is merely constructing Eros in his own image as Agathon did, or whether Socrates, in his practice of Diotima's mysteries, has remodelled himself in the image of Diotima's Eros, I leave to the reader.

First, Diotima proceeds to curiously describe Eros' as a sort of extramundane ferryman or medium *between* worlds; Love is one of "the messengers who shuttle back and forth *between* the two [gods and men], conveying prayer and sacrifice from men to gods, while to men they bring commands from the gods and gifts in return for sacrifices" (202e, 203a).¹⁶⁹ Second, Diotima discusses Love's genesis. Eros is the consequences of the intermingling of resources and indigence with a dash of cunning, thus he is a clever medium between the two; Eros is "never completely without resource, nor is he ever rich" (203e). His conception could be a deleted scene from Animal House. At the celebration of Aphrodite's birth, Poros (Resource) son of Metis (Cunning) has one glass of heavenly punch too many, saunters out of the party onto the lawn, and passes out in the bushes of Zeus' garden. Penia (Poverty), a real vagabond and far from being delicate and beautiful if she is anything like her son (203c–d), then creeps into the garden and lies beside Poros with a "plan to alleviate her lack of resources," cue elbow nudge and eye wink (203c). And thus Love was conceived.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ From the epistemological claim at 202a that allows for a middle ground between two ways of existing, immortality and mortality respectively.

¹⁶⁹ Emphasis mine.

¹⁷⁰ Diotima also forwards a dubious reason as to *why* Love loves beauty; Love is by nature a lover of beauty (go figure), for he was conceived on the birthday of Aphrodite, and "Aphrodite herself is especially beautiful" (203c).

Diotima's illustration of Eros now moves to the *daimon*'s character, calling to mind a familiar face. The *daimon* inherited a character from both of his parents; as "the son of Poros and Penia, his lot in life is set to be like theirs," though his nature is a mean between those of his progenitors (203c, 190a–b). Like his mother, Eros is always poor and far from being delicate and attractive but is tough and shrivelled like an old barnacle without a home (203c–d), a real nomadic urchin "always living with Need" (203d). Like his father, Eros is a cunning schemer always pursuing "the beautiful and the good,"¹⁷¹ impetuous, bold, brave, and intense calling to mind in the image of a fighter (203d). Eros is neither immortal nor mortal, for he springs to life at one moment when he might get his way, then passes away the next (203e). Even when Love might get his way, anything that Love motions toward always slips out of his grasp, like sand in a fist, perhaps calling to mind the frustrating hunt for Virtue and the Ideas in Plato's dialogues (203e). Eros is a being in between reason and ignorance (204a), and altogether, Diotima describes Eros as a wily hunter that always weaves snares and stratagems, always resourceful in his pursuit of wisdom (for wisdom is extremely beautiful 204b), and a philosopher throughout his whole life pursuing wisdom.¹⁷² In short, Diotima fabricates an image of Eros that evokes the image of Plato's Socrates, a wily hunter trekking through the mist of ignorance in hot pursuit of the *logos* (203d).¹⁷³

Socrates, our beloved, mischievous gadfly seems to embody Diotima's (or perhaps his own) image of Eros. Because Socrates seems to be an image of Eros, it might follow that Eros is necessarily Socratic and thus philosophic, and that so too is Socratic philosophy necessarily erotic. This would suggest that eros and philosophy share an inextricable relationship. On the one hand, eros plays a mitigating role directing philosophy; on the other hand, philosophy plays a mitigating role directing eros. Further, if we sympathize with the proverb that "like is always drawn to like" (192a, 195b), then one might say that philosophy cannot help but gravitate toward the city and its erotic nature. What I wish to draw the reader's attention to, however, is that there seems to be an element to Diotima's account of Eros that goes unnoticed. Upon a careful reading of the text, I wish to forward the argument that Eros is in fact Hermes—or at least, Eros is

¹⁷¹ Compare Diotima's reason for Eros' love of beauty 203c.

¹⁷² Compare 204b1–3 to *Euthydemus* 279d10–11.

¹⁷³ See Zuckert, *Philosophers*, 194, 298–99, 302, 666 n72, 791. Newell, *Passion*, 79, 84, 94.

Hermes in an older form.¹⁷⁴ If this is indeed the case—that Eros and Hermes are one—then if Socrates is an image of Eros, and if Eros is Hermes, would that make Socrates Hermetic? What would this suggest for the dialogue and political life?

3.4 Socrates ↔ Eros ↔ Hermes ↔ Socrates ↔ Eros

To illustrate my point that Eros might be Hermes and that Socrates might be both erotic and hermetic, we must look closely at Diotima's description of Love's character and draw from Alcibiades' encomium of Socrates. Let us first compare Diotima's depiction of Eros to Hermes as classically understood. Hermes, like Eros, is 'in between,' and like Eros, Hermes is largely non-moral.¹⁷⁵ Both Eros and Hermes are messengers, beings that shuttle back and forth between men and gods, Hermes being the servant and messenger of the Olympians, a sort of mediator between the visible and supernal domains (202e).¹⁷⁶ Because Hermes is in-between and a messenger entre mortals and gods, one might not consider it a stretch to think that Hermes, like Eros, is a being that shuttles prayers and sacrifices from men to the gods, while to men he brings orders and fine gifts from the divine, especially since Hermes is the god of commerce and exchange (202e).¹⁷⁷ Especially interesting is Diotima's claim that Eros is a being "in the middle of the two [mortal and divine, he rounds] out the whole and binds fast the all to the all" (202e). On the one hand, the claim is interesting because Hermes is transgressor and *maintainer* of boundaries, binding fast the underworld, the mortal world, the world of the heavenly Olympians, and everything in between.¹⁷⁸

On the other hand, compare Diotima's assertion at 202e to the first principle of the hermetic teaching, which is *unity* and *binding* captured in the expression 'One the All,' signifying the suppression of the opposition of all dichotomous states, whose result is a state of androgyny.¹⁷⁹ Continuing this line of thought, it is perhaps an interesting coincidence that Hermes' eros incites him into a love affair with Aphrodite; consequently, Hermes sires a son,

¹⁷⁴ John von Heyking makes a similar observation in *Lysis*. See John von Heyking, "Hermes as Eros in Plato's *Lysis*," *History of the Human Sciences*, vol. 26, no. 5 (2013), 132–154.

¹⁷⁵ Martin L. West, trans. *Homeric Hymns, Homeric Apocrypha, Lives of Homer*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 145, 153. Rose, *Greek Mythology*, 145–146. That is, assuming that Love is not good, not bad, but neither good nor bad.

¹⁷⁶ West, *Homeric Hymns*, 145.

¹⁷⁷ Rose, *Greek Mythology*, 145. Hamilton, *Mythology*, 34.

¹⁷⁸ West, *Homeric Hymns*, 113, 159. Rose, *Greek Mythology*, 145. Hamilton, *Mythology*, 34. von Heyking, *Hermes*, 134.

¹⁷⁹ Evola, *Hermetic*, 20–21.

Hermaphroditos.¹⁸⁰ Continuing this peculiar line of thought *even further*, Hermaphroditos' exceeding beauty enchanted the river god Salmakis, causing her to fall "violently in love" with him, but he spurned her advances.¹⁸¹ The river god prayed for everlasting unity with her beloved Hermaphroditos, and her prayers were answered; Salmakis and Hermaphroditos, lover and beloved, collapsed into a single being, the hermaphrodite, the androgyne, whose significance we discuss above in the speech of Aristophanes.¹⁸² To go a single step further, Hermes is also the father of Pan, the lustful and playful fertility deity whose name also means 'All'—Hermes the father of All.¹⁸³

Let us now consider the role of Hermes in divination, "the art of priests in sacrifice and ritual, in enchantment, prophecy, and sorcery" (203a). While just a swaddling baby, Hermes created the cult of the twelve Olympian gods and the religious rites of sacrifice, and from Apollo he learned the minor art of divination and prophecy.¹⁸⁴ Although the gods dislike mingling and conversing with mortals, Hermes has no issue communicating with men, in fact for Hermes it is quite pleasing (203a).¹⁸⁵ What is especially interesting, however, is how Hermes communicates with us "whether we are awake or asleep" (203a). On the one hand, when we experience a sudden halting thought, epiphany, or beatific vision from dialectic or otherwise, this sublime reflective experience is said to be a visitation from Hermes.¹⁸⁶ One might consider Socrates' moment of reflection on Agathon's porch, his pondering at Potidaea, or any of the many instances where Socrates is overcome by his divine sign or *daimon* as possible visitations of Hermes, for example: *Euthyphro* 3b; *Apology* 31c–32a, 40a–b, d; *Theaetetus* 151a; *Symposium* 175a–b, 220c–d; *Phaedrus* 242b–d; *Crito* 31d; or *Euthydemus* 272e. On the other hand, Hermes is the bringer of dreams,¹⁸⁷ and we might consider the variety of occasions that Socrates discusses his own dreaming, such as *Apology* 33c; *Crito* 44a–b; *Phaedo* 62d–61b; *Philebus* 20b; *Theaetetus* 201d–202a; *Charmides* 173a. Following this line of enquiry, if Socrates is an image

¹⁸⁰ Rose, *Greek Mythology*, 148.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, Evola, *Hermetic*, 21.

¹⁸³ Rose, *Greek Mythology*, 145, 167. We will discuss the satyrs and sileni below.

¹⁸⁴ West, *Homeric Hymns*, 123, 157. Rose, *Greek Mythology*, 147.

¹⁸⁵ "Hermes—for to you especially it is very pleasing to accompany a man, and you give ear to whomever you are minded—up, go and guide Priam to the hollow ships of the Achaeans in such a way that no man may see him or recognize him among all the Danaans, until he comes to the son of Peleus." Homer, *Iliad: Books 13–24*, trans. A. T. Murray (London: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 587. Rose, *Greek Mythology*, 167.

¹⁸⁶ West, *Homeric Hymns*, 117.

¹⁸⁷ West, *Homeric Hymns*, 115. Rose, *Greek Mythology*, 167.

of Eros, and if Eros and Hermes share some sort of relationship, then we might have more reason than meets the eye to consider Socrates a “man of the spirit” rather “than merely a mechanic;” perhaps Socrates is indeed a holy man (Smp. 203a).

There seem to be allusions to Hermes all throughout Diotima’s characterization of Eros. Even the parents of Love possess especially Hermetic qualities. For instance, Hermes is the god of *boundaries*, “a gate lurker” and threshold crosser, and both Eros and Penia bide their time by the gate or doorsteps, as we see the latter waiting to penetrate the party to be penetrated by Poros, according to Diotima’s story (203b–c, 203d).¹⁸⁸ Hermes as god of roads and journeys would also in some sense sleep “in roadsides under the sky,” for his idols forever stood erect by the highways.¹⁸⁹ Further, Hermes, like Eros and his father Poros, is exceptionally shrewd and cunning, a hatcher of stratagems, the king of thieves, an expert of denials, and a deity versed in and associated with the ritualistic arts; Hermes is indeed “a genius with enchantments, potions, and clever pleadings” (203d).¹⁹⁰ The most peculiar parallel between Eros and Hermes, however, is that Hermes was a fertility god before becoming an Olympian; his oldest cult monument was an erect phallus, thereby suggesting that Hermes was always in some way erotic, sexual, and a transgressor of boundaries.¹⁹¹ Perhaps Hermes was the god that gave Socrates his ability to recognize immediately a lover or beloved (Ly. 204b–c).

If we infer from Diotima’s speech that Socrates is a reflection of Diotiman Eros, then Alcibiades’ encomium of Socrates continues the suggestive theme of a relationship between Hermes, Eros, and Socrates. Alcibiades’ encomium suggests an analogous or genealogical relationship between Hermes and Eros through the medium of Socrates. For instance, Alcibiades compares Socrates to satyrs anatomically and with regards to their conduct, demeanor, and power, especially emphasizing Socrates’ semblance to the satyrs Marsyas and Silenus specifically (Smp. 215a–d, 215e–216a, 216c–d, 216e–217a, 221d–e).

Let us briefly consider Alcibiades’ comparison of Socrates to the satyrs, and let us consider what Alcibiades’ comparisons might mean for the hypothetical relationship between Eros and Hermes. Satyrs are notoriously concupiscent creatures. They are ugly, short little goat-

¹⁸⁸ West, *Homeric Hymns*, 115, 153. Rose, *Greek Mythology*, 146. Hamilton, *Mythology*, 34.

¹⁸⁹ West, *Homeric Hymns*, 119. Rose, *Greek Mythology*, 146.

¹⁹⁰ West, *Homeric Hymns*, 123–25, 137, 145, 155, 157. Rose, *Greek Mythology*, 145, 147.

¹⁹¹ Rose, *Greek Mythology*, 145. von Heyking, *Hermes*, 134, 140, 141.

men characterized by unlimited, unrestrained, and unguided sexuality.¹⁹² There are young satyrs and older satyrs, the silenoi.¹⁹³ Whereas the satyrs are younger, filled with revelry, and overall merry beings of the woods often celebrating with wine, the older silenoi are usually heavy with drunkenness.¹⁹⁴ In appearance, the silenoi are cheerful (albeit ugly) old men, balding, pot-bellied with snub noses, sharing a striking likeness with Socrates.¹⁹⁵ The silenoi, however, despite their drunkenness do possess a sort of wisdom and sobriety, *and* they were the nurses and tutors of Dionysus in his youth—Silenus, one of the silenoi, being the wine-god’s foster father and chief educator.¹⁹⁶

Alcibiades’ comparison of Socrates to the satyrs is not solely anatomical, though Socrates is a satyrical looking man (Tht. 143e). Alcibiades also compares Socrates to the satyrs in conduct, demeanor, and power. First, and a simple comparison, Socrates seems to be an erotic man like the satyrs, for he is always trying to make company with beautiful young men, though their ephemeral beauty might not be Socrates’ principal interest (Smp. 216d–e, 222c–d, 223a–b). Next, Socrates is in a sense musical and versed in mousike; Marsyas used the music from his pipes “to possess and so reveal those people who are ready for the god and his mysteries,” but Socrates needs no instruments, for his words alone to charm and possess, perhaps preparing the party for Diotima’s rites (212b–c, 215c–d, 216c–d).¹⁹⁷ Then there is the curious question of the wisdom of the silenoi, especially Silenus. Alcibiades compares Socrates analogously to the Silenus statues and their namesake, for they contain inner beauty that betrays their craggy exterior, and we might suspect that Socrates harbours some inner fortune in the form of wisdom that he guards from his peers (215b, 216d, 216e–217a, 221d–222a).¹⁹⁸

¹⁹² Rose, *Greek Mythology*, 156.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ovid. *Fasti*. trans. James G. Frazer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), .bk i. 399, bk iii. 749. Hamilton, *Mythology*, 396.

¹⁹⁶ Hamilton, *Mythology*, 396, Karl Kerényi, *The Gods of the Greeks*, (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1980), 177, 180.

¹⁹⁷ The silenoi are also especially musical creatures. See Rose, *Greek Mythology*, 156.

¹⁹⁸ The ‘secret wisdom’ of Silenus, however, is truly surprising. As myth has it, King Midas, the ruler of Phrygia, caught Silenus at a spring near Macedonia by mixing wine within its waters, thereby getting Silenus drunk. Midas then had Silenus bound and brought before him, and demanded to know his secret wisdom. With reluctance, Silenus told Midas his secret: “the best fate for man was not to be born at all, the next best, to die as speedily as possible after birth” (Rose, *Greek Mythology*, 157). Consider the discussion of *Phaedo*, especially Socrates’ advice for Euenus at 61b6–8. One might also consider Socrates’ confession to Alcibiades at *Symposium* 219a. At its best,

Let us bring our analysis of Hermes and Eros full circle. I ask the reader to entertain an interesting hypothesis: Earlier we posed the hypothetical that Eros is Hermes, and we supported the claim with some comparative evidence. We also noted that Socrates holds an uncanny resemblance to Diotima's depiction of Eros—a wily hunter. We inferred that if Eros is Hermes, and if Socrates is in some sense an image of Eros, it follows that Socrates is in some sense an image of Hermes as well. This line of reasoning gains strength when we consider Alcibiades' encomium of Socrates. Alcibiades tells the party that Socrates' character is very close to that of a satyr, and he emphasizes that Socrates is especially Silenus-like. Naturally, we can infer that if Socrates is an image of Diotiman Eros, and if Socrates is Silenus-like, then Diotiman Eros is Silenus-like. Now, the point I wish to make is that if Eros is Silenus-like, then we can infer that Eros, and thus Plato's Socrates, are in some sense Hermetic. This is an inference founded on genealogy. Hermes sired a variety of satyrs—Hermes being the alleged father or grandfather of Silenus, the nurse and caretaker of Dionysus—and the satyrs were Hermes' companions as well as members of Dionysus' merry entourage.¹⁹⁹ Eros and Hermes share a relationship and might even be the same entity, or so it certainly seems.

If Eros is Hermes and if Eros is thus Hermetic, a salient quality of Eros is thus the transgression and maintenance of boundaries. If such is the case, the Hermetic Eros, and thus Socratic philosophy, is indivisibly political by nature.²⁰⁰ However, Socrates himself would not be Eros or Hermes respectively (though they may be One), but merely an image of them both. An image is a reproduction, a flawed copy of an original. Therefore, the description of Socrates as Silenus-like captures, condenses, and bridges our discussion of the nature of Eros and Hermes into the character of a single man—Socrates is Silenus-like and therefore an image of Silenus,

Silenus's confession might be a sort of cryptic message; we might extrapolate something like the discussion in *Phaedo* that man ought to distance himself from his human limitations as much as possible to cultivate the part in himself that is godlike. Alternatively, Silenus' secret seems macabre and profoundly antinatalist, suggesting that man's existence is itself a blight that finds remedy only in death. If Socrates is analogous to Silenus in character, is Socrates' analogous to Silenus in content, i.e., is Socrates' wisdom analogous to the secret wisdom of Silenus?

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. Maurus Servius Honoratus, *Commentary on the Eclogues of Virgil*, vi. 13. See <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2007.01.0091%3Apoem%3D6%3Acommline%3D13>. H. David Bumble, *Classical Myths and Legends in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: A Dictionary of Allegorical Meanings*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998), 257, 311. Hamilton, *Mythology*, 44.

²⁰⁰ Newell comes to the same conclusion—that Socratic philosophy is necessarily political—though his conclusion derives from a different line of reasoning. See Newell, *Passion*, 71.

Silenus is an image of Eros and the offspring of Hermes.²⁰¹ We now have an image of an image in a memory of a memory. The Socratic philosopher thus seems to be both Hermetic and Erotic, a terrestrial image of the *daimon* in-between forever pursuing the beautiful, good, and noble in all domains of life, both public and private.

Diotima concludes the portion of her speech about “the nature of the Spirit called Love” (204c). Socrates concedes that what Diotima says about Eros is beautiful, and we can see how Socrates presumably came to recognize that he, like his companions at the dinner party, mistook Love for the thing loved rather than the process of loving—love is a way of being (204c). We then see Socrates press on in accordance with the description of wily, philosophic Eros on the hunt, for he is not yet satisfied, but asks Diotima to explain Love’s use to human beings (204d). We now approach Diotima’s mysteries.

3.5 Function of Diotima’s Teaching

The function of Eros in the Socrates-Diotima speech is arguably the most contested topic in the *Symposium* literature. There seems to be only but general agreement about how we ought to understand what we can properly call ‘Diotima’s mysteries.’ And I think this title suiting, not only because it captures the ideas of the mystagogue from Mantinea along with the fictional world of the dialogues, but the title also captures a practical reality. I have yet to see any reading of the Socrates-Diotima speech that proves to be the unequivocally true reading of the speech. There are better and worse readings, which, frankly, are more persuasive and less persuasive respectively. However, on the one hand, the persuasive readings might not actually be true to the authentic reading—Plato’s reading—which is a problem. On the other hand, even the best readings are not altogether airtight, and a great deal of Platonic scholarship comes tumbling down like houses of cards under the pressure of demand for demonstration.

²⁰¹ Let us briefly consider some implications our analysis might have for the dialogue. Alcibiades’ drunken entrance into the party recalls an image of Dionysus, the beautiful youth’s head “crowned with a beautiful wreath of violets and ivy and ribbons” (212d–e). If the dialogue means to have Socrates embody the character of Silenus and Alcibiades that of Dionysus, Alcibiades’ speech becomes increasingly intelligible. Silenus is the foster father and educator of Dionysus, and we can thus understand why Socrates spurned Alcibiades’ beauty and why Alcibiades describes his night alone with Socrates as no different “than if I had spent it with my own father or older brother!” (219d). Socrates might be, in some sense, the foster father and tutor of Alcibiades, just as Silenus was the foster father and nurse of Dionysus. However, Midas sets a wreath on Silenus’ head, just Alcibiades arranges ribbons on Socrates’ crown (213e). See Hamilton, *Mythology*, 396. One might also consider how Alcibiades and his party destroyed the faces and genitals of the statues of Hermes around Athens and what this might signify for this reading.

The problem of criterion of proof pervades the Platonic scholarship more generally, as we discuss in the initial chapter. There is a problem of criterion of proof because we lack the Archimedean point necessary to measure our interpretations of Plato's thought against the authentic inner workings of his own mind. And even if we knew what Plato intended when he wrote the dialogues—what his authentic intended meaning was at the time of writing—Plato's *Seventh Letter* suggests that the ideas he immortalized in writing are not his bona fide beliefs. Instead, the alleged doctrines within the Platonic dialogues seem to be hypotheses open to critique that encourage and stimulate further reflection, and this even includes the theory of Ideas and what is known as Diotima's Ladder.²⁰² With these observations in mind, let me frankly say that my own work poses no remedy the problems that pervade the Platonic literature when it specifically comes to capturing the historical Plato.

3.6 Eros and the Human Things

Socrates now tells the party what Diotima taught him about the use of Eros concerning human things (204d). Before imparting to Socrates what we could call Diotima's teaching proper, Diotima makes a number of distinctions and primes Socrates for her mysteries. First, Socrates and Diotima again engage in brief elenchus thereby reviving and recalling the earlier the general thrust of the argument remains in the background. Diotima describes Eros as a love for beautiful things, a way of being characteristic of the lover (204d). Love and lovers desire that beautiful things become their own (204d). Now, with a simple question, Diotima sets the conditions necessary to introduce one of her distinction. She poses a question that surprisingly catches Socrates without an answer: "What will this man have, when the beautiful things he wants to have become his own?" (205d–e). Because Socrates does not have an answer, Diotima rephrases the question and proceeds to her first distinction, seamlessly exchanging 'beautiful' with 'good' which recalls propositions 11 and 12 (204e).²⁰³ When she poses the question to Socrates anew—what will a lover of good things have when the 'good' things he desires become his own?—this time Socrates has a definite answer: When a lover possesses the good things that he desires, then

²⁰² On this point, I am in agreement with Newell. See Newell, *Passion*, 83.

²⁰³ Keep in mind that at 201c Socrates moves from good to the beautiful, i.e., if a thing is good, then the same thing is beautiful, ergo good things are beautiful. However, Diotima does not make this inference, and merely swaps beautiful with good without making them material equivalences and seems to move away altogether from beauty as an object of desire.

“he’ll have happiness” (205a).²⁰⁴ For possessing good things makes people happy, and is not the desire for happiness the character of the human condition, and is not happiness itself the end of human life? Diotima then slyly slips in a second distinction—a distinction that opens the line of enquiry left unexamined at 200b–e, proposition 5—through a rhetorical question: Do we not all wish to possess good things “forever and ever?” (205a). Of course we do, that is “common to all,” says Socrates (205a).

Diotima then turns to a discussion of taxonomy distinguishing the genus and species of love, conveniently commenting on concepts from the previous speeches that she did not have the pleasure of hearing, especially the speech of Aristophanes. Diotima—who is clearly in control of the discussion at this point—launches this *logos* with a leading question: “why don’t we say that everyone is in love ... since everyone always loves the same things [i.e., why don’t we say that everyone is in love, because we all love and desire to possess good things forever so that we can be happy and possess happiness forever]? Instead, we say some people are in love and others are not; why is that?” (205b). I say that Diotima asks a leading question because Socrates admits to wondering the same thing, only to have Diotima immediately dismiss that wonder by providing a concrete answer (205b). Her answer is to differentiate between the genus and species of love. On the one hand, there is the word ‘love’ that signifies the *whole* of love—Love Itself—which might signify a love of the whole, hence a philosophical, cosmologically unifying and harmonizing erotic power that calls to mind Eryximachus’ description of a unitary harmony between Uranian and Polyhymnian eros (186b, 188d). On the other hand, when we talk about love we tend to talk about different ways of loving or ways that love is manifest, yet we refer to these instantiations of love with the word that signifies the whole. For example, we can talk about constructive and destructive eros, Uranian and Polyhymnian respectively, yet these two species of love are logically (and perhaps ontologically) subservient to Love Itself, the whole of Love.²⁰⁵

From the previous line of reasoning, we can thus grasp the distinction that Diotima seeks to make: “every desire for good things or for happiness is ‘the supreme and treacherous love’ in everyone,” though one cannot help but notice that Diotima seems to be describing universal

²⁰⁴ Nehamas and Woodruff make a note that the word for happiness used is εὐδαιμονίας. As we discuss earlier, this is a broad term that can be used to express the entirety of the flourishing and fulfilling life.

²⁰⁵ Interestingly, Diotima proceeds to compare Love Itself to Poetry Itself to explain to Socrates the difference between the universal and the particular. One might consider the relationship between love and poesis discussed in Agathon’s speech.

Love in the human context (205d).²⁰⁶ Now, because we all desire good things and happiness generally, we would think we would could say that everyone is in some sense a lover, and in a very general sense we all are lovers animated by Love (186b, 187e–188a, 188d). Despite this, however, Diotima tells us that we do not call our various dabblings in pursuit of happiness love or that we are lovers. Instead, the title of being in love and being a lover is reserved for those people “devoted exclusively to one special kind of love,” i.e., when someone pursues a particular good exhaustively (205d). Thus it would seem that we call someone a lover and say that they are in love when Eros animates their soul in such a way that they love the whole of a thing comprehensively. However, regardless of the object of love that one loves and pursues wholeheartedly, Diotima tells Socrates that, fundamentally, “what everyone loves is really nothing other than the good,” and it looks as though Love is the desire to possess the good forever—the good is the true object of love (206a–b). In a paradoxical and roundabout sort of way, Diotima undermines the very distinctions about Love that she initially sought out to make while simultaneously making an effort to maintain the distinction (205a–206b). What would remain is the universality of Love, and that the particular instantiations of Love that we experience are just that—instantiations we experience, conceptual distinctions only. To ground her conception of Eros as a universal desire to possess the good forever, Diotima absolutely requires a foundational ontological model and scale that allows for the differentiation and justification between better and worse, legitimate and illegitimate, ways of loving and things loved. Otherwise, there is simply Love manifest in a variety of different ways pursuing a manifold of good things with no discrepancy whatsoever.

We now turn to Diotima’s teaching proper, which we will see attempts to justify her previous distinctions about Love. If the object of love is to possess the good forever, we are left to consider what is the *means* by which lovers are to possess good things forever and ever. Diotima then forwards her famous answer: lovers possess goods things forever and ever by “giving birth in beauty, whether in body or in soul” (206b). I will confess I am unsure what this enigmatic statement means and I cannot make heads nor can I make tails of Diotima’s teaching for I am uninitiated, and even Socrates says that it “would take divination to figure out” what

²⁰⁶ Bury translates the passage as “Love most mighty and all-beguiling,” which removes the staunchly negative tone of ‘treacherous.’ The idea of an all-beguiling Love falls in line with Diotima’s former description of Love as a hatcher of stratagems and a wily hunter. See <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Plat.+Sym.+205d&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0174>.

Diotima means (206c).²⁰⁷ I will thus rely on the guidance and prudence of but a handful of those enlightened in the mysteries of Love for this final section.

3.7 The Lower Mysteries

R. Wedgwood breaks Diotima's speech down into three convenient parts.²⁰⁸ As we have seen, the first section focuses on characterizing eros and concludes with Diotima's assertion that love is the desire for happiness (199d–206d).²⁰⁹ The second section discusses the function of eros and the concept of procreation and giving birth in beauty (206b–209d).²¹⁰ The third section discusses the final, highest mysteries of eros, focusing on the relationship between the lover and the Form of Beauty Itself (210a–212b).²¹¹ Zuckert characterizes these three parts as three respective stages of Socrates' erotic education, and that the second and third part of the Diotima speech outlines three ontological levels of reproduction in beauty.²¹² Alternatively, Nehamas argues contra Zuckert that the discussion of parts two and three of Diotima's speech focuses a discussion of two distinct categories of lovers that reproduce in beauty—one category of lover that climbs all *four* rungs of Diotima's Ladder, and one category that does not.²¹³ With these models in mind, let us consider what Diotima might mean by 'beautiful.'

Waller Newell makes the observation that *the beautiful* (τὸν καλὸν) can have a broad scope of meaning in Greek not restricted to the mere aesthetically pleasing, for it includes the noble and the fine.²¹⁴ This broader conception of the beautiful introduces a moral element to the concept that might otherwise go unnoticed in the modern conception thereof. Further, F. C. White makes a convincing case for the relationship and distinction between the good and the

²⁰⁷ Nehamas and Woodruff note the ambiguity of the passage itself, especially the use of "in." The passage is unclear as to whether the lover gives birth actually "within" beauty, whether the lover in some sense engages in intercourse with beauty and produces offspring, whether the lover gives birth himself in the presence of beauty or whether he causes another to give birth in the presence of beauty, whether the lover begets on a beautiful thing, whether the beautiful is a medium that the lover births through, and so on. See Cooper, *Complete Works*, 489 n41. Also consider Bury's translation of the passage, "'Well, I will tell you,' said she; 'it is begetting on a beautiful thing by means of both the body and the soul.'" See <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Plat.+Sym.+206b&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0174>.

²⁰⁸ Wedgwood, *Eudaemonism*, 298.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Zuckert, *Philosophers*, 196, 198.

²¹³ Nehamas, *Contemplation*, 1. See Obdrzalek, *Transformation*, 429 and Christina Ionescu, "The Transition from the Lower to the Higher Mysteries of Love in Plato's *Symposium*," *Dialogue*, vol. 46, no. 1 (2007), 28 for a similar reading.

²¹⁴ Newell, *Passion*, 81. Also consider Wedgwood, *Eudaemonism*, 301n5. See <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0057:entry=kalo/s2>.

beautiful in *Symposium*. White argues that the terms *good* and *beautiful* are not interchangeable in the Socrates-Diotima speech.²¹⁵ White writes,

The fact that *beautiful* and *good* are mentioned together here and elsewhere is often taken to mean that according to Plato these characteristics are the same and their terms interchangeable, but the fact that *good* and *beautiful* go together no more means that they are the same than the fact that *equiangular* and *equilateral* go together in Euclidean geometry means that these are the same.²¹⁶

White notes that readers tend to conflate *beauty* and *good* with *Republic*'s Form of the Good.²¹⁷ This is a mistake according to White, because the good and the beautiful are ontologically distinct, hence why Diotima says we seek the good forever rather than the beautiful (206a–b). As Wedgwood points out, however, to say that we love beautiful things is not altogether false. The problem is that saying we love beautiful things misses an “adequately illuminating” philosophical account of the object of love—it is lacking phenomenologically.²¹⁸ For this reason, I find it persuasive when Newell says beauty “is not so much the goal of erotic longing as it is a kind of *pleasing medium* through which the good is pursued and brought forth.”²¹⁹

To return to the cryptic metaphor of “giving birth in beauty, whether in body or soul,” let us consider what Diotima says at 206c, “all of us are pregnant ... both in body and in soul, and, as soon as we come to a certain age, we naturally desire to give birth.” Diotima’s assertion about pregnancy and idea that we are all pregnant recalls Socrates’ comments about pregnancy in *Theaetetus*, the metaphor that we are pregnant with ideas that we must labor to birth and Socrates’ role as a ‘midwife’ that delivers people pregnant with thoughts (Tht. 148e, 149b, 150b, 151b, 160e, 184b, 210b; Sph. 268a–b). Christina Ionescu argues that Diotima’s discussion of pregnancy recalls another dialogue, *Meno*, and that perhaps the doctrine of recollection (M. 80d–81d; Phd. 73a–76d) informs Diotima’s teaching.²²⁰ If Ionescu is right that we should presuppose recollection when reading the dialogue, then we can explain how we are pregnant before intercourse according to Diotima, pregnant with what we have “been carrying inside ... for ages”

²¹⁵ White, *Beauty*, 69n.5, 71, 71n.12.

²¹⁶ White, *Beauty*, 69n.5.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Wedgwood, *Eudaemonsim*, 310.

²¹⁹ Newell, *Passion*, 79. Emphasis mine.

²²⁰ Ionescu, *Transition*, 27.

(Smp. 209c).²²¹ Ionescu's reading would also suggest that we can give birth with a beloved or we can simply give birth in beauty itself on our lonesome, and both of these modes of birthing (especially the latter) imply recollection, which might serve as a bridge between the lower and higher mysteries.²²²

The key to cracking Diotima's metaphor, or so it would seem, is to understand Diotiman Eros as productive, cultivational, and delivering. Diotiman Eros seems to be a predominantly—though not exclusively—human desire to produce progeny in both body and soul through the medium of the beautiful, and a desire for progeny-to-be and currently birthed progeny in both lover and beloved to come to fruition; eros is in this sense a sort of force of transgression, cultivation, and maintenance. This line of enquiry seems to maintain the impression of Diotiman Eros as an image of Socrates and Socrates as an image of Diotiman Eros, Diotiman Eros being Hermetic.

The idea of eros as a productive-cultivating-delivering force transitions smoothly into the discussion of immortality. Eros desires to beget, nurture, and birth, and what Eros desires is “not beauty,” according to Diotima, but “reproduction and birth in beauty” (206e). “Maybe,” says Socrates (206e). We desire to possess good things forever and ever. We thus desire immortality in some way. The fulfilment of this desire naturally faces the problem of our creaturely and ephemeral limitations. We die. Diotima offers us a solution to this problem. We do possess one transient means of immortality—reproduction (206e–207a). As Diotima tells us, “among animals the principle is the same as with us, and mortal nature seeks so far as possible to live forever and be immortal. And this is possible in one way only: by reproduction, because it always leaves behind a new one in the place of the old” (207d). On the one hand, reproduction is the mortal means to fulfilling our desire for immortality through a form of renewal.²²³ On the other hand, reproduction is the means by which we can come to possess good things forever and ever, for we want to possess good things and we want to be immortal to possess them forever. Conveniently, it would seem that the desire for reproduction both sexual and otherwise—and thereby the desire for immortality—is an indivisible part of eros, though we cannot reduce eros exclusively to the

²²¹ Ionescu, *Transition*, 31.

²²² Ionescu, *Transition*, 27–31.

²²³ This renewal is not only the means by which man reproduces, but renewal also seems to transpire in the body and mind (207e–208b). Thus the mortal nature that desires to be immortal (207d) is not restricted solely to man's soul, but happens in all organic life and possibly the soul as well.

reproductive urge and act. Beauty is the medium through which eros actualizes and satisfies this desire for immortality.

We now seemingly have the tools necessary to make sense of the final parts of Diotima's teaching, and we can now turn to her mysteries. Concerning the structure of the mysteries, I follow the reading of Nehamas and Ionescu. There seems to be two rough tiers of mysteries, which reflect two kinds of lovers. There are the lower mysteries (201d–209e), and there are the higher or “ecstatic” mysteries known as ‘Diotima’s Ladder’ (210a–212c). The lower mysteries seem to consist of two forms, or rather steps to transient immortality.²²⁴ First, there is physical procreation whereby “some people are pregnant in body,” and the eros of these pregnant people compels them to beget in the bodies of others (or be begotten in) and the mutual pregnancy comes forth in the beautiful expression of childbirth, whereby a replica stamped with the character of both parents is brought forth into the world. Put simply, the first rung of the lower mysteries seems to consist of fulfilling eros’ desire for immortality and goodness in the basest form, its expression being the performance of the reproductive sexual act at the biological level—childbirth. The beautiful act of childbirth perpetuates the being of both progenitors, carrying on their biological legacy that bring them happiness, though childbirth is but a transient form of immortality (208e–209a).

The second step of the lower mysteries, according to Diotima, is spiritual generation, a form of pregnancy in the soul (209a). Lovers who climb to the second step are those who “are pregnant with what is fitting for a soul to bear and bring to birth,” which she tells us is “wisdom and the rest of virtue” (209a). The eros of these “poets”²²⁵ compels them beget wisdom and virtue, and they are the great artists, craftsmen, poets, legislators, and statesmen, all of those who are creative and produce beautiful and lasting works (209a). Diotima gives especial honor to the virtue and wisdom that statesmen and legislators beget, for “the greatest and most beautiful part of wisdom deals with the proper ordering of cities and households, and that is called moderation and justice,” politics (209a–b).

One might wonder why just a few moments prior Diotima seemed to dismiss honour-seekers—and thus implicitly statesmen, warriors, and all men and women of great ambition—as

²²⁴ Nehamas, *Contemplation*, 1. Ionescu, *Transition*, 28.

²²⁵ Recall our discussion of the relationship between eros and poesis in Agathon’s speech.

irrational (208c). However, the desire for honour is indeed completely rational, if not fundamentally natural. One need only to consider what Diotima has been saying about the human desire for immortality. Pursuing honour and glory is but another means to preserving one's memory in the minds of others, thereby perpetuating one's existence in the world. Diotima seems to emphasize that the highest honour goes to those who redirect their eros to act authentically to *produce* something great that not only satiates their own erotic longing and desire for immortality, but also improves the wellbeing of others. For this reason, Diotima seemingly gives grand statecraft the highest praises because it satiates the statesman's erotic desire for power thus immortalizing him while simultaneously establishing lasting structure and order in the world in the form of laws and institutions that improve the wellbeing of the city at large.

The transition from the first step to the second involves a form of sublimation, strongly suggesting the malleability of human eros. The lover must expand the domain of his erotic longing and redirect the aim of his eros to a worthy object of love. This sort of erotic transcendence broadens the focus and domain of the lovers' erotic desire. The lover begins desiring beautiful bodies and biological reproduction, and then his eros broadens and aims higher, seeking beautiful souls and the birth of great works and deeds while still incorporating the desires of the lower rung. According to Diotima, those pregnant of soul seek to beget and give birth as they mature, and like all of us, they thus seek some beauty in which to beget and give birth (209b). Like those of us that remain on the first step, those pregnant of soul cannot help but find beautiful bodies captivating and cannot help but desire to reproduce with them. If this person is fortunate, "if he also has the luck to find a soul that is beautiful and noble and well-formed, he is even more drawn to this combination" of beautiful body and soul (209b). Now, a person with a beautiful body and soul stimulates he who is pregnant of soul in such a way that makes him "teem with ideas and arguments about virtue," and the man pregnant of soul cannot help but want to educate his beautiful beloved in all manners of nobility and virtue (209c). Here we seem to see the seeds of philosophic friendship, the pederastic relationship we find in the speeches of Phaedrus and Pausanias.²²⁶

²²⁶ Nehamas, *Contemplation*, 1. Ionescu, *Transition*, 28.

Through the medium of the beautiful beloved, the lover pregnant of soul is able to satiate his eros and birth what he carries inside himself, nurturing in common with his beloved their mutual offspring. Diotima makes an alarming statement, saying that “such people ... have *much more to share than the parents of human children*, and have a firmer bond of friendship, because the children in whom they have a share are more beautiful and immortal (209c–d).²²⁷ These relationships produce great and lasting works such as great deeds, laws, institutions, and high poetry who through the immortal of their very greatness bring everlasting esteem, fame, and admiration for the progenitors (209d–e). Diotima even goes so far as to hold the relationship between these lovers—a relationship the dialogue implies is pederastic, though it might not be the case unequivocally—to higher esteem than the relationship between biological parents, not only with regards to the strength of the bond, but also concerning the sublimity of their children. This would suggest that Diotima sees well-oriented pederastic relationships and their offspring as ontologically higher than the family, which for many would seem counterintuitive, for we tend to see family as the foundation and backbone of the community. It is telling that Diotima considers the second step of the *lesser* mysteries ontologically superior to the family.

The difference between the two stages of the lesser mysteries seems to be a minor ontological climb. The first step to the second within the lesser mysteries seemingly consists of a psychological shift whereby the object of desire and desire’s respective form of immortality moves away and broadens from physical transience toward a good object and mode of reproduction of ontological superiority. Put simply, the first step to the second is a redirection of eros from reproduction and giving birth biologically toward reproduction through the medium of a beautiful soul in a beautiful body and giving birth to great works, deeds, and statecraft. The first step of the lower mysteries promotes the happiness and perpetuation of the individual and the beloved whereas the second step promotes the perpetuation of the individual and his happiness, the happiness of the beloved, and the happiness and wellbeing of the community at large. Moving from the first step to the second is a matter of transcending the eros of individual interest and redirecting it in such a way that not only satiates the erotic longing and desire for immortality of the individual but is conducive to the flourishing of the overall community as well. However, we must emphasize that Diotima’s last words on the lower mysteries do focus on

²²⁷ Emphasis mine.

the honour of parents for their immortal children (209e). For Diotima says, “I believe that anyone will do anything for the sake of immortal virtue and the glorious fame that follows; and the better the people, the more they will do, for they are all in love with immortality” (208d–e).²²⁸ Diotiman eros—and thereby Socrates—is not without a vein of egoism, though the dialogue would suggest that we could hypothetically channel this erotic egoism to fulfill itself in tandem with the common good.²²⁹ Newell seems to be right when he suggests that Diotiman eros seeks to satisfy desire while elevating it, to channel desire for domination and personal gain into noble achievement on behalf of the good of the community, and this seems especially true of the higher mysteries.²³⁰

3.8 Higher Mysteries

The higher mysteries, Diotima’s Ladder, possess a far more metaphysical character than their lower counterparts do. Diotima’s Ladder is also a far more radical reorientation and sublimation of human erotic longing than what we have seen in any of the previous speeches. As a transition from the lower to the higher, Diotima says, “Even you, Socrates, could probably come to be initiated into *these* rites of love [the lower mysteries]. But as for the purpose of the rites when they’re done correctly—that is the final and highest mystery, *and I don’t know if you are capable of it*” (210a).²³¹ A very curious line. The higher mysteries themselves seem to consist of four distinct stages. These rough four stages bear a striking resemblance to Plato’s Divided Line, which begin at opinions (εἰκασία) and ends at understanding or seeing (νόησις, νόος) (R. 509d–511e). We might draw a parallel between *Symposium* and *Republic*; Diotima’s Ladder begins with opinions about Beauty and ends with truly seeing and understanding the Beautiful. We might even incorporate Ionescu’s observations and hypothesize that climbing Diotima’s Ladder is a process of re-familiarizing ourselves with Beauty itself.

The first stage of the higher mysteries begins very similarly to the lower ones. The lover begins with a devotion beautiful bodies (Smp. 210a). If Love leads him correctly,²³² the lover will love *one* body and beget beautiful ideas there (210a). The lover begins to move from the

²²⁸ One might compare Diotima’s account of the relationships between Achilles and Patroclus, Alcestis and Admetus to Phaedrus’ discussion thereof (179d, 179e–180a, 180a, 208d–e).

²²⁹ Obdrzalek leans toward a more selfish reading of the Socrates-Diotima speech. See Obdrzalek, *Transformation*, 436.

²³⁰ Newell, *Passion*, 79, 81–82.

²³¹ Emphasis mine.

²³² Smp. 193b, 197e.

love of particulars to a love of universals. If the lover can become self-aware of his own erotic longing for beauty in one body, then he can redirect his eros toward the love of all beautiful bodies—or rather physical beauty more generally—and he will necessarily come to realize that obsession for one beautiful body is foolish and worthy of scorn (210a–b). We can see a clear development of eros, the development being an ontological reorientation and climb. As the lover’s love for physical beauty moves from particular physical beauty to a love of universal physical beauty, the lover’s eros is primed to make another ontological leap. This new leap consists of erotic transcendence from the desire for universal physical beauty to the love of beauty of the immaterial variety—the love of the beauty of a soul—an ontological shift that demarcates the transition from the first rung of Diotima’s Ladder to the second.

On the second rung of the ladder, the lover’s eros seeks beautiful souls so that he may alleviate his pregnancy by birthing virtuous ideas through conversation that make young men better, regardless of their physical beauty. Immediately we call to mind Socrates and his insatiable thirst for conversation with boys beautiful and ugly alike, ranging from the handsome Alcibiades and Agathon to the snub nosed Theaetetus. We also recall the paideic character of Socratic conversation, and how there does indeed seem to be an authentic effort on the behalf of Socrates to improve the souls of the young men he converses with, and that these conversations in some sense satiate Socrates’ desire.

From these conversations and ideas about virtue stemming from the love of beautiful souls, the lover moves to the third distinct rung of the ladder, which consists of an attraction to the beauty in activities, laws, customs, and the various branches of knowledge (210c–e). At this point, the lover’s eros becomes even broader, grasping the fringes of a form of beauty beyond particularity. He does not concern himself with the beauty in singular instantiations (though he undoubtedly finds them beautiful), but his erotic drive for beauty pulls him beyond the particular to “the great sea of beauty,” the beauty of knowledge as a whole (210d). At this rung, eros’ raw desire for beauty compels the lover to transition into a philosophic life in order to find satisfaction. Being pregnant, the lover births theories and ideas. Whether or not Plato’s Socrates has made it thus far on the ladder is unclear, though he certainly voices a great variety of theories throughout the dialogues. In due time, the lover—who is now a full-fledged lover of wisdom, a philosopher—catches sight of the knowledge of beauty and his eros spurs him onward to the

final rung of Diotima's Ladder.

The final rung of Diotimas' Ladder involves the contemplation of Beauty (210d–211a). Whoever guides their eros and orders its objects in the way Diotima outlines “is coming now to *the goal of Loving*” (210e). Not only would Diotima's Ladder suggest that there is an authentic ontological scale of worthy objects of love, but this passage especially suggests that eros has a *teleological* end, not only in the human case, but universally. The ordering of eros and its objects in this way is the final, *natural* expression of fully developed erotic longing in the human domain, its highest expression. The object of this erotic longing is the form of Beauty Itself, that which is both Beautiful and is “itself by itself with itself ... always one in form; and all the other beautiful things share in that” (211b). Diotima then sums up the higher mysteries succinctly. She says,

This is what it is to go aright, or be led by another, into the mystery of Love: one goes always upwards for the sake of this Beauty, starting out from beautiful things and *using* them like rising stairs: from one body to two and from two to all beautiful bodies, then from beautiful bodies to beautiful customs, and from customs to learning beautiful things, and from these lessons he arrives in the end at his lesson, which is learning of this very Beauty, so that in the end he comes to know just what it is to be beautiful (211c–d).²³³

Diotima tells Socrates that the ordering of one's eros and its objects in the way she outlines is the only way one can experience Beauty, to *see* it (212a). Such a life—the philosophic life—is by no means a substandard way of being, and the philosophic life is the only way to behold Beauty as it ought to be held, and to be *with* Beauty. When the philosopher looks at Beauty in the only way it can be truly seen, the philosophic lover can satiate his eros and reproduce and birth true virtue, because he is in the presence of—“in touch with”—true Beauty (212a). True virtue is the offspring of the philosophic lover's erotic desire to reproduce and birth in Beauty, and these offspring along with their cultivation bring him closer to immortality than all other lovers. Socrates' speech brings the dialogue to an erotic climax worthy of “loud applause” (212c).

3.9 Reflections on Diotiman Eros

The Socrates-Diotima speech opens many questions about the role and purpose of eros in Platonic philosophy. By virtue of the very richness of the speech and its elevated discussion, we

²³³ Emphasis mine.

cannot possibly hope to articulate—let alone answer—the sheer volume of beautiful ideas and questions the speech engenders. However, I would like to touch on a few ideas before moving on to our final considerations on eros.

First, let us consider the relationship between the lower and higher mysteries, and to what degree Socrates progressed with Diotima's teaching. While I could be wrong, there does seem to be a genuine disconnect between the lower and higher mysteries, though they in some sense overlap. Indeed, the focus of both the lower and higher mysteries is the satisfaction of the subjective erotic longing for good and immortality. Regardless of who we are, we all want to possess good and beautiful things forever and ever. Nevertheless, the lower mysteries are politic and ethical in a sense that the higher are not. On the one hand, this statement is obvious, for the lower mysteries care for the transient world. On the other hand, and what I wish to focus on, is the idea of care.

The lower mysteries emphasize a bond of friendship that seems to be altogether absent in the higher mysteries, specifically the firm bond that the lover and his beloved share (209c). Additionally, the lesser mysteries encourage great works and great deeds that benefit the community at large, especially statecraft. While the satisfaction of the desire of the lover and beloved plays a central role in the lesser mysteries, there does seem to be an effort to benefit oneself in such a way that mutually betters the community as well. This concern for the wellbeing of others—even if it is only secondary to one's private desire—does not seem to be present in the higher mysteries. Or, at least, the wellbeing of others is not emphasized in the higher mysteries. In fact, it would seem that the lover in the higher mysteries is devoid of empathy and the emotional connection we stereotypically associate with being in love. All beautiful things are merely a means to the lover's ends of erotic satisfaction and the desire for immortality, and this includes friends, family, and lovers. Does the philosopher leave his friends and community behind? Does he even care for them? Is Socrates, or maybe Plato, a cold egoist at heart? One cannot help and do little more than wonder due to the "unclearness" of Diotima.²³⁴

These observations and speculations are easy to challenge. First, perhaps our immediate reflex to fixate on the instrumentality of goods within the higher mysteries, and especially on the

²³⁴ Wedgwood, *Eudaimonism*, 310.

utile character of the relationship between the lover and his friends and boyfriends, is simply a Christian sentiment characteristic of a post-Christian society and upbringing. From all angles, our teachers and guardians engineer those of us that are ambitious to be selfless, and they implant in us a reflex to react negatively toward the idea of ‘infringing’ and ‘disrespecting’ human dignity by not making the success and wellbeing of others our social priority. Though this engineering might have some conveniently selfish aims on behalf of the engineers, the fact of the matter is that we all use our friends and lovers in some way. In fact, I think that using one’s friends and lovers to satisfy one’s self-interests and cultivate one’s own wellbeing is entirely natural. However, a distinction is necessary. The difference between a sociopath and a noble lover is fundamentally a distinction of psychology that informs demeanor. The sociopath regards the beloved *only* as a means, while the noble lover regards the beloved as *both* a means and an end in himself. The noble lover authentically believes that his beloved has value independent of instrumentality. He believes that his beloved possesses some good and beauty by virtue of his very being—the beloved has intrinsic value. We can thus say the mysteries harbour a kind of egoism, but an egoism of a healthy and human variety. Noble lovers can utilize their beloveds to fulfill their desires mutually while still respecting each other as human beings. Thus, both lover and beloved can ‘use’ each other without their bond dissolving to a relationship of means. Such a reading of the mysteries is entirely plausible.

One need only consider the relationship between the lesser and greater mysteries to entertain the plausibility of what I will call an *optimistic* reading of the mysteries. Rather than read the lower and higher mysteries as two distinct tiers, we might consider the mysteries as two distinct *orientations* that to a large degree overlap. Where the two mysteries differ seems to be psychological and epistemological disconnect about the proper object of eros, both of which naturally inform the demeanor and conduct of each respective lover. The two mysteries are the same insofar as they both agree that eros strives to possess good things forever and be immortal. The disconnect between the lower and higher mysteries, however, seems to lie in the *how* to go about fulfilling this desire and *what* the object of eros indeed is. Because both mysteries share the same overarching goal, and because they really only differ insofar as how one understands the goal, how to achieve it, and about their respective conduct, there is no reason to deny the possibility of an overlap.

The overlap between the lower and higher mysteries makes sense if we reflect on the human desire for happiness. I think we can all agree that the best and happy life necessarily requires devotion to something meaningful.²³⁵ Examining the mysteries, however, the lower and especially the higher seem to fixate on particular objects of desire, almost as though the lover is wearing erotic blinders. However, this begs a question: Do we all care for one single object of eros, i.e., do we only care for a single thing? In an abstract sense, we can say yes, because we all foundationally desire to possess good forever and ever and be immortal. Alternatively, in a practical sense, we can say no, and we can say no because the fact of everyday experience is that we love a variety of different things and we seek satisfaction in a variety of different ways, thereby satiating our foundational desire for good. A well-functioning human cares for various things, not just one thing. This said, we can remedy the otherwise impersonal and cold character of the higher mysteries by incorporating the lesser into the higher.

As Nehamas points out, the dialogue never suggests that someone is bad or wrong for loving the lower mysteries, but the dialogue implies that there is greater happiness awaiting an eager lover in the higher.²³⁶ It follows that the philosopher can love his beloved, his friends, love honour, seek to produce great works, participate in politics, while still having his eye on the truth, so long as he orders his desires correctly. In fact, this type of life, a mixed life, seems like a much happier, much more human life. We can see no reason why the philosopher who undertakes the mysteries would leave his beloved boy behind or stop loving him and caring for his soul, though he may spurn the boy's ephemeral beauty (Smp. 216d–e, 218e–220d, 222c–d, 223a–b).²³⁷

Alternatively, one could forward the argument that the topic of *Symposium* is not about the ideal friendship or the ideal relationship. Rather, one could posit that the topic of *Symposium* (and the topic of the Socrates-Diotima speech especially) concerns the proper ordering of eros and its objects. If such is the case, it is unfair to expect the Socrates-Diotima speech to explicate a subject other than its central thesis, especially if Plato has his Socrates discuss the matter elsewhere.

²³⁵ Nehamas, *Contemplation*, 3.

²³⁶ Nehamas, *Contemplation*, 5.

²³⁷ Nehamas, *Contemplation*, 4–5.

Let us now consider the relationship between the Socrates-Diotima speech and those of the preceding speakers. The Socrates-Diotima speech seems to be both synthetic and innovative. The speech is synthetic insofar as it incorporates a number of ideas from the preceding speeches into its central thesis. The speech is innovative insofar as it employs the ideas of the previous speakers as ontological stepping-stones for the purposes of carrying the conversation to greater heights, for the purposes of transcendence. To name a few and by no means all, the Socrates-Diotima speech incorporates the ideas about the human manifestations and of erotic longing for physical beauty that characterize the core of Phaedrus and Pausanias' respective speeches. From their speeches, Socrates also incorporates the idea of loving nobly and the sublimation of erotic energy toward noble deeds, thereby satiating eros twofold for its desire for physical beauty and glory. Socrates legitimizes the desire to make pederastic relationships acceptable, even going so far as to rank them higher ontologically than the biological family.

From the speeches of Eryximachus, Aristophanes, and Agathon, Socrates adopts a variety of ideas. First, he seems to adopt the universality of eros described by Eryximachus, and the idea of eros as a cosmological force that can remedy and heal discord, or possibly promote disharmony.²³⁸ From Aristophanes, Socrates seems to adopt the idea of human longing for a soulmate as a possible instance of misguided eros—or rather, that it such an object of eros is legitimate, but inevitably lacking phenomenologically. Socrates might also adopt the hypothesis that what we truly want is something of higher ontological magnificence, which Aristophanes hints to in the myth of Hephaestus—we *think* we want unification with our soulmate. From my own reading of Aristophanes' speech, perhaps eros desires to return to the original hermaphroditic geometrical unity, order, and harmony echoed by the congruous and ordered primordial cosmos. From Agathon (and in some sense Eryximachus), Socrates adopts the inspirational character of eros, the idea that eros in some sense animates us and guides us to produce and engage with the world in a meaningful way to create. Perhaps most characteristically, Socrates seems to adopt from Agathon the idea that Beauty is the object of eros' longing (though he tweaks it), and that there is a distinct ontological scale of beautiful things.

²³⁸ Newell, *Passion*, 77.

From here, we can begin to entertain and speculate about some of the logical consequences of the Socrates-Diotima speech. Socrates recognizes that different *logoi* appeal to different kinds of souls.²³⁹ Rather, Plato seems to recognize this truth about human beings, and this seems to be a theme weaving throughout the Platonic dialogues. By synthesizing some of the ideas of the previous speakers into his own speech, Socrates is able to incorporate the different expressions of erotic longing of his friends into a single speech that not only offers a way to satisfy their desires, but also encourages reflection on those desires and their objects. Fundamentally, Socrates' speech seems to encourage reflection on individual eros and its objects, but it encourages this reflection through the adoption of a new psychological outlook. This outlook involves a kind of 'turning around' that informs and prompts a new way of 'seeing.' On the one hand, this 'seeing' enables Socrates' friends to recognize a hierarchy of sublimity of objects of love. The higher the object of eros on the ontological ladder, the greater degree of happiness one will obtain should he make the object his own. On the other hand, this new psychological outlook and the 'seeing' that it fosters prompts a lover to become aware of Beauty Itself, the ultimate medium of all erotic longing for the good. Altogether, and I am agreeing with F. C. White's suggestions; Diotima's Ladder promotes the embrace of *all* beauty.²⁴⁰

Another question that the Socrates-Diotima speech raises concerns the nature of immortality. The speech establishes that all of us wish to possess good and beautiful things forever and ever. Diotima's Ladder allegedly brings a lover as close to Beauty as possible so that he may come to possess some good and be immortal with it. However, the Ladder seems ambiguous about the great good that the lover comes to possess and how he is to be immortal. Presumably, the great good that the lover comes to possess is knowledge of the Forms, "the goal of all Loving" (210e–211d). If the aim of eros is to possess good forever and ever, and if knowledge of the Forms is the goal of all Loving, then knowledge of the Forms, or the Forms themselves, are the good that a lover seeks to possess forever and ever. While some might question the existence of Forms and the possibility of concrete knowledge thereof if they exist,

²³⁹ Newell, *Passion*, 96. "There is no surprise—you cannot win over by argument and reason someone who does not value reason *at all*, no matter how good and valid the arguments." See Amber Danielle Carpenter, "Hedonistic Persons: The Good Man Argument in Plato's *Philebus*," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2006), 23.

²⁴⁰ White, *Beauty*, 73.

and while the thought of possessing for oneself a necessary existence outside of space and time remains dubious, the reader still faces the question of immortality. How can the lover possess a Form or the knowledge thereof forever and ever once he reaches the highest rung?

The text would suggest that a philosopher could possess neither a Form nor knowledge thereof permanently, or at least not as we conventionally understand ‘possession.’ On the one hand, it is absurd to think that a transient being could possess that which “always *is* and neither comes to be nor passes away, neither waxes nor wanes” (211a). On the other hand, Diotima recognizes that our knowledge is never static, and that it will inevitably pass away (207d–208b). Thus, possessing a Form or knowledge of the Forms seems to be out of the question.

Perhaps there is a way that a philosopher can possess the Forms or knowledge thereof, and perhaps he can possess these things while simultaneously satisfying his desire for immortality in some way. One alternative is to adopt the doctrine of recollection from *Meno* and *Phaedo* (M. 80d–81d, Phd. 73a–76d), which suggests that our souls possess knowledge of the Forms *a priori* and because our souls are immortal we thereby possess this knowledge forever. However, our senses and bodily limitations hamper our memory of the Forms. Therefore, to rekindle truly our bond with the Forms, we would have to shed our corporeal body and exercise our souls once we are most free so that we may recollect and familiarize ourselves with the knowledge in our souls once more. Thus, the eros of the philosopher finds satisfaction in death, for his soul is immortal and possesses that which he so desperately craves forever and ever, and let us recall that eros is a movement of the soul extended to the body (Phlb. 35c7–d3). For those of us who are erotic, politic, and terrestrial, this reading hits a sour note, as it would seem that nothing, including philosophy, can satisfy eros’ fundamental longing in *this* world. We do not achieve completeness until death. However, perhaps there is an alternative path.

As Diotima has told us, reproduction is the mortal means to immortality. Now, throughout Diotima’s teaching we notice an ontological scale. As a lover climbs the ladder in either the lower or the higher mysteries, the lover begets and births offspring that perpetuate his existence. As the lover climbs each rung of the mysteries, his progeny become greater ontologically and more lasting. At the top rung of the Ladder, the lover births true virtue, and he is the most likely to become immortal of all human beings (Smp. 212a–b). What does it mean to birth true virtue? White makes a compelling case that the philosopher pursues Beauty, not

because Beauty is the lover's ultimate object or because he wishes to commune with Beauty forever, but the philosopher pursues Beauty to produce true virtue, which is the philosopher's offspring.²⁴¹ According to White, the true virtue that the philosopher produces are *true discourses*; true virtue is *not* a state of the philosopher's soul.²⁴² Through these true *logoi* the philosopher achieves immortality, for he lives and can immortalize his knowledge in the form of *logoi* and he lives on with this knowledge in the form of true discourses in some way.²⁴³ We can thus say that the philosopher possess good (i.e., knowledge of the Forms) in some abstract sense, for he and his *logoi* are intertwined. While the philosopher's terrestrial character carries on in an echo, the immortality he achieves does not perpetuate his individual sentience. This immortality is not personal.²⁴⁴ Again, we find ourselves with palms full of sand when it comes to satisfying the desire to possess good forever and ever.

These two lines of enquiry highlight a problem that pervades the entire Socrates-Diotima speech: the erotic conflict between subjectivity and transcendence.²⁴⁵ On the one hand, eros compels us to soar beyond our creaturely limitations, for we desire to live forever *as individual sentient being* and possess good things for all time. In other words, we desire for our intelligible character to be immortal. However, this intelligible character—the whole composed of qualities and characteristics that make us who each and every one of are quintessentially, the existential 'I'—this character is overwhelmingly transient in nature. As consequence, to transcend oneself in many ways to leave oneself behind. With every step we take on Diotima's Ladder toward the authentic fulfillment of our eros, scraps of our individuality gradually melt away.

Before us are a set of maddening alternatives to satisfy our eros. Our alternatives are human children, great works and deeds, true *logoi*, and death. However, with any of these choices, the 'I' does not carry on, but merely echoes through time until it becomes so faint that it unifies as one with the deafening silence of eternity. In fact, death seems to be the only way that eros finds its true expression and satisfaction, permitting that the Forms and the human soul indeed exist. However, the Forms are at best a hypothesis, and the existence of the soul at best a

²⁴¹ White, *Beauty*, 74. White, *Virtue*, 366–67, 372.

²⁴² White, *Beauty*, 74–75.

²⁴³ White, *Virtue*, 373–374.

²⁴⁴ White, *Virtue*, 377.

²⁴⁵ Newell makes a similar observation, though my reading is a bit more cynical. See Newell, *Passion*, 82.

leap of faith.²⁴⁶ Regardless, my point is that it would seem to be the case that eros can never find complete fulfillment and satisfaction in the human condition—eros in human form will never possess good things forever and ever, and it is perhaps for this reason that Diotima characterizes love as a “disease” that plagues all life (207b). While this reading might bode darkly for philosophy, perhaps we are guilty of wanting to keep our cake and to eat it too. If we accept our human condition, then perhaps we might find solace in the enjoyment of the climb, dedicating our lives to Diotima’s mysteries though we acknowledge that the golden apple remains forever out of reach.

²⁴⁶ For a discussion of Plato’s account of the immortality of the soul, see Dorothea Frede, “The Final Proof for the Immortality of the Soul in Plato’s *Phaedo* 102a–107a,” *Phronesis*, vol. 23, no. 1 (1978), 27–41.

Chapter 4: Final Remarks on Eros, Not the Final Words

4.1 Introduction

Recalling the discussion of Chapter 1, this thesis seeks to highlight a particular problem within the Platonic literature. Specifically, how can so much of the literature about Plato—a philosopher studied for literally thousands of years—be so rife with disagreement even about the simplest things? As we discuss in the two preceding sections, there seems to be two categories of problems that feed into the problem of authorial intent. There are problems of object, and problems of subject. Plato's *Seventh Letter* and the ambiguity of the dialogues as a medium create an air of haziness around Plato's philosophy. Plato chose to write in a way that makes it difficult for readers to discern which views are fundamentally his own, assuming he did write his personal views down. There are also all the epistemological difficulties inherent to subjectivity that hinder our knowing Plato's mind and thoughts as we know our own. These problems of subject and object flow into the pool of problems of interpretation more generally. It would seem that none of us can present an authoritative, historical interpretation of Plato's philosophy that can withstand the skepticism of a reasonable doubt. With these points in mind, this thesis sought to employ a methodology, the eclectic method, encouraging a way of reading, thinking, and speaking about Plato and his ideas while being aware of the various limitations outlined. To demonstrate these methodological principles, we sought to enquire into the nature of eros.

After trekking through the first six speeches of *Symposium*, we have before us a manifold of ideas about the character of love and all things that pertain to its domain. From our discussion of groundwork of eros down to our analysis of Diotima's mysteries, each speech and almost all the snippets from other dialogues that we examine inspire our image of eros in some way. Perhaps now we are in the position to forward an answer to the question, What is Love?

4.2 Phenomenology of Eros

First, let us consider what the dialogue's form and content might tell us about eros. If we consider the dialogue's structure, we can see that the ordering and content of each speech bears a striking resemblance to the structure of Diotima's Ladder, especially the higher mysteries. Just as the dialogue suggests that eros soars if sublimated and if its objects are ordered ontologically—an ordering to which the dialogue and certainly the Socrates-Diotima speech attribute normative character—so too does the ordering of the dialogues' speeches seemingly suggest an order

according to the sublimity of their content and subject matter. Phaedrus praises love in relation to beautiful bodies; Pausanias discusses love in relation to good laws and customs; Eryximachus, Aristophanes, and Agathon all discuss eros in relation to some *techne* and branch of knowledge; Socrates' speech is the philosophical apex that incorporates the former speeches into itself in pursuit of the good and beautiful for the purposes of individual and mutual transcendence. We can see a parallel between the higher mysteries and the ordering of the speeches on our reading, though one could interpret these speeches differently. Regardless, the form of the dialogue would suggest that eros has a flexible character, and possibly a teleological end, a final natural expression. As the content of the dialogue certainly suggests, eros can climb ontologically toward harmony and we ought to encourage this climb, or eros can descend into disharmony and we ought to discourage this fall, or at the very least nourish this latter expression of eros moderately.

Symposium offers a great variety of descriptions about eros and its character, from a private driving force to an omnipresent cosmological binding power. The dialogue suggests to us that eros animates our private and public lives, inspires us to grand politics and great works of art, encourages philosophy, yet it might lead us down the path of devilishness and mean spiritedness, if unchecked. The speeches tell us that eros is two and then one, beautiful and not beautiful, harmonious and disharmonious, a god and not a god, and finally 'in between.' We see a great range of objects of eros such as human beauty, the unity and harmony echoed by an orderly cosmos, and even Beauty itself. We also see a great variety of ways of how one can or ought to love. However, the discussion of eros within the dialogue seems to be predominantly descriptive rather than phenomenological.

Said differently, much of the discussion within *Symposium* contemplates the qualities or ways that eros expresses itself and the objects of love rather than contemplate what eros itself is as a phenomenon. The reason for this, I think, is that there is a kind of disconnect between the discussion and its object. A discussion seeks to put its object on display out in the open for all to see, yet love is something whose effects we clearly see though its presence is made known only intimately to the human heart. Eros is not something we can put on display and examine like an ox or a cart. Eros is an emotional force, a feeling or power we are aware of from personal experience. By reason of its very nature, eros is a phenomenon that one cannot authentically

know or describe unless one has felt it, and there is hardly any feeling more vivid and electrifying than being in love.

There seem to be three reasons that a phenomenology of love, or a phenomenology of any human emotion, will fall short of adequately capturing and explaining the experience. First, almost all phenomenologies begin with a distinction between subject and object. However, unlike a phenomenology of something in the natural world, such as a tree or a rock, or something theoretical, like mathematics, a phenomenology of an emotion or feeling is self-reflexive. In other words, a phenomenology of love is an examination of a subject's own inner experience. This poses a problem. A phenomenology of love would entail an effort to 'step outside' subjective experience to examine a subjective experience, being in love. Not only is 'stepping outside' of one's own subjectivity to evaluate one's own experience impossible, but even if one could 'step outside' oneself and evaluate one's own subjective experience of love from an objective vantage point, the 'observer' must necessarily have experienced love himself. The observer must have experienced love himself if what he is observing, i.e., the subjective experience of eros, is to be at all intelligible, and he must have experienced love himself if his analysis is to be meaningful at all. To sum this problem up from a different angle, a phenomenology of love or any human emotion will necessarily be incomplete because the phenomenologist as subject cannot examine his own experience and give an account of that very experience at the same time that he is experiencing the experience. The account must be given upon reflection, after the fact, even if the subject is in a state of loving (since a subject consciousness may only engage in one act at a time insofar as it is one consciousness). The phenomenologist can at best give an account of his experience of love, of any emotion, or any object of consciousness only in hindsight, always in memory. His analysis will always lack the authenticity of the experience in the moment, and his reflection may alter the memory. The greatest obstacle for a phenomenology of eros (or for phenomenology generally) is the clash between subject and object, and the clash between subjectivity and the Archimedean point, the view from nowhere.

The second reason why a phenomenology of love necessarily falls short of capturing and explaining the experience stems from the first. Phenomenologies of emotion and feeling are relatable and thus persuasive *only* because those they persuade have experienced these feelings

and emotions beforehand. For this reason, spectators are able to associate and correspond their own experiences to what the phenomenologist is describing. In other words, the phenomenology itself reveals nothing, and it does nothing more than articulate an emotion or feeling in the phenomenologist who presupposes a similar feeling in his audience. To be utterly frank, a phenomenology, discussion, poem, painting, or demonstration will *not* teach an oaf or a boor what love is in the way we might teach mathematics, lest it inspire love in their hearts. Without that experience of love, a phenomenology of love, and therefore a discussion of love through any medium loses almost all meaning for that spectator. We again see the limits of any analysis of eros, and thereby the limits of any discussion of eros. The analysis and the discussion are not the thing itself nor are they the experience itself.

The third reason why a phenomenology of love necessarily falls short of capturing and explaining the experience naturally follows from the first and the second. Following our previous discussion, the subjective and intimate character of eros highlights the limitations of language when we try to discuss love. Language does not adequately capture what we mean by love, for words are merely symbols, placeholders that refer to concepts and ideas. Talking about love, its intimate character, its intensity, the other associate feelings etc., are thus in some sense lost when we discuss eros. These things are lost in language because they are entangled with subjectivity, and there is really nothing in the external world to which we can refer, compare, or associate these subjective experiences so that we may convey what we mean by being in love. The best we can do is hope that the person with whom we converse has experienced something similar enough to our own experience so that we may converse meaningfully. For this reason, even the best phenomenology of love is in some sense nothing more than a sketch of the authentic experience, and the discussion of the phenomenology is only intelligible if we associate our experience with its subject matter.

For these reasons collectively, any phenomenology or discussion that seeks to establish an objective account of eros or any human feeling seems doomed to failure. Any definition of eros, no matter how succinct, seems to fail to capture eros as a phenomenon because we become aware of and know eros in a radically inward sense.²⁴⁷ The more we use language to describe

²⁴⁷ Charles Segal, "The Myth Was Saved": Reflections on Homer and the Mythology of Plato's Republic, *Hermes* vol. 106, no. 2 (1978), 323.

eros and effort to deracinate it from being as it is—or, put differently, every time we, like metaphysical taxidermists, attempt to detach eros, any emotion, or *any being* from its circumstances and pin it to canvas, like a butterfly or moth, so that we might put it under our penetrating, searching lens of inquiry, we in some sense find ourselves further away from experiencing and knowing what something is as it is within the context and way that it is. In the case of eros, when we engage in phenomenology thereof and attempt to define it, eros inevitably becomes “all thin, sort of stretched, if you know what I mean: like butter that has been scraped over too much bread. *That can't be right.*”²⁴⁸

4.3 The Absurdity of Love: Eros as Self-Negating

Moving on and with these lines of reasoning in mind and recalling our discussion about the conflict between individuality and transcendence and the end of Chapter 3, we cannot help but notice that *Symposium*'s presentation of eros as a natural phenomenon and its teleological aim lead to a logical absurdity. Frankly, the arguments within the dialogue seem to suggest that eros by nature is fundamentally absurd. Ergo, if the goal of life consists of satisfying eros, then life is absurd. Allow me to illustrate my point, and I ask the reader to keep in mind that we are working with the arguments from this dialogues and others.

As we discuss at the beginning of Chapter 2 and continue through Chapter 3, love is a kind of desire. We observe that desire is a painful lack in the soul, a process of filling and emptying, and that a key part of human experience is the detection, the *awareness* of the presence of this painful absence within the soul itself. Because love is a kind of desire, love also stems from the awareness of a painful lack in the soul itself. We learn that this pain in the soul is a pain for good things. However, we can extrapolate that it is not the things themselves we seek, but the good more generally, or the good in some more absolute sense. We want good things because they make us happy, and happiness is the end of all life. Further than this, we all seek to be happy forever. However, we do not seek solely our own immortality, but also the immortality of our beloved object. We thus desire immortality with and within the presence, and in the possession of, the good. Because our means of perpetuating ourselves is reproduction, it looks as

²⁴⁸ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord Of The Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 32. Emphasis mine.

though love is the soul's erotic desire to reproduce in and with the good, and the soul seeks this because it wishes to be complete and happy, harmonious, thereby negating its initial lack.

Thus far, we can see no clear issue with the nature of eros. However, let us push the argument further. If we take the account of love thus provided to its logical conclusion, then the apex of love is transcendental in nature. The consummation between lover and beloved, in its truest sense, i.e., the authentic satisfaction of eros, logically necessitates a collapse of the distinction between lover and beloved, subject and object. The collapse of lover into beloved, of subject into object, culminates in a state of harmonious and unitary neutrality. Such a description calls to mind the universalized state of androgyny we discuss in the speech of Aristophanes, calling to mind the Orphic Egg. To borrow a line from Agathon, the authentic satisfaction of eros “fills us with togetherness and drains *all* our divisiveness away” (Smp. 197d).²⁴⁹ If all divisiveness is drained away, then the lover and thing loved become like, and eventually become indistinct from, each other—like becomes like. The pain in the lover's soul is thus healed, his eros satisfied completely.

Let us now consider the absurdity of eros. Eros is absurd because there is a fundamental conflict between eros' final desire for satisfaction and eros' role in nature. In nature, desire and eros animate life. Living things are finite, and they are thus needy and lacking. By virtue of their lacking nature, as a response, living things feel pain, which includes the soul in some extended sense. Desire and eros stem from the awareness of the inherent pain of finitude. Eros is the organic expression and reaction to this awareness of painful finitude—eros is a force, a striving to remedy the pain of mortal existence.

In the organic sense, one of the ways that eros strives to remedy the pain of mortality is reproduction. Reproduction is the most basic reaction against finitude, an attempt to break the shackles of depletion, stagnation, and degeneration. In other words, reproduction is a form of creation, a reaction against motion and change, the root of all lack. In this sense, eros drives to transcend its paltry condition by extending its existence through time and space in an effort to escape change. Another way that eros remedies the pain of mortality is to proactively transition itself toward objects of lack, goods or good more generally. In tandem, reproduction and the

²⁴⁹ Emphasis mine.

possession of goods seem to be eros' organic effort to transcend and escape finitude while remaining finite—perpetuation while minimizing the pain inherent to transience. In the human condition, the dialogue suggests that these two expressions of eros, i.e., reproduction and the possession of goods, motion toward a kind of harmony conducive to happiness.

However, the organic expression of eros grinds against eros' fundamental drive for satisfaction. Eros' fundamental aim is to heal, permanently, the pain from whence it derives its origin, thereby achieving a state of harmonious neutrality. Eros' fundamental drive for satisfaction is thus a fundamental drive for the elimination of the painful condition from which eros sprung, and it follows that eros' fundamental striving for satisfaction is a fundamental desire for self-negation—eros' motions to eliminate the conditions that give rise to eros. Expressed differently, logically, if eros is authentically satisfied, then eros ceases to exist. To illustrate this point, the idea that desire desires to continue desiring is a contradiction in terms, for it would imply that desire aims to perpetuate the very painful lack from which it stems and which it fundamentally seeks to heal. Alternatively, if desire desires that which it already possesses, then eros does not actually possess what it possesses in an extended sense. In both of these cases, eros is not authentically satisfied, and in the former case, eros is fundamentally misguided and reflexive, character of the heart of the tyrant.²⁵⁰ If desire exists, a fundamental lack and disharmony exists from which it stems. If there is no fundamental lack and disharmony, then eros has no source. Ergo, if eros seeks satisfaction, eros seeks self-negation

The absurdity I wish to highlight is the force that creates new life and seeks immortality is the same force that seeks self-negation. Eros, the animator and backbone of life, literally seeks to stop existing, not to be, in its pursuit for satisfaction. One might object and say that eros seeks above all to stop existing *as it is* and transcend transience to become godly and exist beyond the human condition. Regardless, my point remains that eros seeks self-negation, for gods logically cannot desire as it would imply a change or lack in an imperfect being. Besides, the idea of man becoming godly is a terribly hubristic and lofty idea. Therefore, the only practical alternative to

²⁵⁰ For further consideration see Mark A. Johnstone, "Tyrannized Souls: Plato's Depiction of the 'Tyrannical Man,'" *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, vol. 23, no. 3 (2015), 423–437, especially 425 and 428; Martin A. Bertman, "Plato on Tyranny, Philosophy, and Pleasure," *Apeiron*, vol. 18, no. 2 (1985), 152–160; Christina Tarnopolsky, "Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants: Plato and the Contemporary Politics of Shame," *Political Theory*, vol. 32, no. 4 (2004), 468–494; David N. McNeill, "Human Discourse, Eros, and Madness in Plato's 'Republic,'" *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 55, no. 2 (2001), 235–268.

eros' satisfaction is death. In death, eros finds complete satisfaction, complete annihilation. Again, the absurdity of eros in the organic condition is that that which produces all above all seeks to be dead. In this light, eros is the stain of mortal existence, a blight and disease, a cruel and stubborn mule that drags onward toward the impossible rather than accepting the practical, inevitable, and *only* outlet for its authentic satisfaction, quietus. This curse of eros seems to be the thesis of *Phaedo* and Silenus' secret.

4.4 The Problem of Erotico-Relativism and Further Considerations

The idea that death is the only outlet for the authentic satisfaction of eros is a dreary conclusion. However, rather than cover ourselves in black garb, adopt a somber tone, and flagellate ourselves like a cliché tribe of sour monks, I think there is another equally live, equally legitimate option available to us. If eros is fundamentally absurd, and if eros animates life thereby marring life itself as fundamentally absurd, I can see no reason not to accept and relish in our imperfection and chose make ourselves as noble as possible. If life is fundamentally absurd, why not make the best of a bad situation and live well?

Not much reflection is necessary to recognize the ramifications of this eros-absurdity thesis and to realize that this happy-go-lucky mindset hits a low ceiling. One need only consider the ontological and political consequences. Ontologically, the absurdity thesis does not suggest that nature or being is fundamentally absurd and haphazard. The world around us can be entirely coherent, and, insofar as it is what it is, the world is coherent. Instead, the absurdity thesis seriously highlights the frustrating nature of human existence. Though we want to live, we will never be truly happy while living because we will never satisfy our eros completely. Though we do not wish to die, we will only find authentic satisfaction and peace in death. Such is the human condition.

The ontological consequences of the eros-absurdity thesis breed erotic and moral relativism. Because the absurdity of eros reduces the human condition to absurdity, the authority of the models of ordered objects of desire in *Symposium* crumbles away. Specifically, the absurdity of eros calls into question all of the ontological orderings of objects of eros within the dialogue, especially shaking and challenging the authority of Diotima's Ladder. The absurdity of eros thesis challenges the authority of Diotima's Ladder because nothing on the ladder can bring eros lasting satisfaction, no lasting happiness. One might object that Diotima's Ladder derives its

authority metaphysically, for it organizes objects on an ascending ontological gradient of being and lastingness akin to the Divided Line.²⁵¹ Part of Diotima's authority lies in her sales pitch; if we redirect our eros to climb this ontological scale, then we will find a greater share of satisfaction and happiness, the implication being that we will find authentic εὐδαιμονία.

Eros' own nature is a defeater for the argument. Whether or not the metaphysical and ontological ordering of the Ladder is legitimate is secondary to the question of eros' fulfillment, just as I highlight above. Because eros is self-defeating by nature, the Ladder's authority as a guide for authentic human fulfillment and satisfaction seriously wanes. The Ladder still possesses authority—people can still argue that it offers a genuine path to some kind of enjoyable life—but the Ladder is stripped of the be-all-end-all authority as the model for human fulfillment and happiness that some of us might like it to have. Instead, a manifold of contending models for erotic fulfillment now vie for supremacy, many of them dangerous and antithetical to the community and body politic.

Eros' self-defeating nature, and thus its absurdity, opens the door to a kind of relativism we will title erotico-relativism. Because eros is by nature a self-defeater, no model for human satisfaction and happiness can claim blanket and unequivocal superiority. Erotico-relativism thus signifies the inabsoluteness of any hierarchy of objects of desire, and therefore a kind of arbitrariness in the choice of a hierarchy. Eudemonism, hedonism, skepticism, stoicism, and so on, can all reasonably forward a claim to satisfy human desire and promote happiness. However, so too do sadism, hooliganism, vigilantism, and all philosophies of violence, debauchery, and criminality. Like Diotima's Ladder, all of these philosophies have a claim to satisfying eros and bringing happiness in some way, and again like Diotima's Ladder, none of these philosophies can claim to or satisfy eros as it seeks to be satisfied in this life. Because none of these philosophies will satisfy eros as it seeks to be satisfied in this life due to its nature, none of these models can refute or shame any other model on their internal claim to promote happiness and satisfaction for eros in some way. The natural consequence is that each model can (and will) claim that it can placate eros and promote happiness *better* than any other model can.

²⁵¹ I, like Newell, cannot help but see the presentation of Diotima's Ladder as a speculative doctrine. See Newell, *Passion*, 83.

As the reader can no doubt ascertain, this erotico-relativism can quickly become dangerous. The great danger lies in that no system will be able to contradict any other system with regards to its internal claim to providing eros with some form of happiness or satisfaction. At best, competing philosophies will call into question the nature of the satisfaction and happiness in the opposing system, criticizing the other on the basis of *a priori* assumptions, appeals to adjacent utilitarian principles, common decency, nature, power, what have you. But again, these criticisms are secondary and miss the *fundamental problem*—in this life, eros is a self-defeater. Because there are no concrete measures or models of satisfaction for human eros, no system is able to refute any other system on the basis of their internal claim to providing eros with some means to satisfaction and happiness without appealing either to secondary principles or begging the question. This might be a very serious issue.

Considerations about eros and our desires are important. These considerations are important because just as eros and desire inform our private lives, so too do they inform our public lives. One need not look far to see how desires, conflicts of interest, and to some extent passions animate our political body. The absurdity of eros and the problems that accompany erotico-relativism are inescapably political and social problems. For instance, erotico-relativism might be a way to understand (and perhaps in some sense it also informs) many of the problems pertinent to value pluralism, a philosophy that the liberal democratic West insists walks hand in hand with multiculturalism. Value pluralism contends that there is no unequivocally true set of moral and ethical values—no unequivocally true or best philosophy of living. Rather, proponents of value pluralism contend that many sets of moral values can be equally correct, even if these values are contradictory. The thesis of value pluralism shares a striking similarity to our observations about eros and the lack of a totally satisfactory model above.

We recognize a parallel between erotico-relativism and value pluralism, and so too can we recognize similar problems. If there is no unequivocally true set of values, then *all* systems of value have a legitimate stake at the table as ways of life. If there is no unequivocally true set of values, then there is the further problem that there is no real measure to evaluate which systems of values are better or worse without assuming an ethical framework and set of values *a priori*. If there is no unequivocally true set of values, then value pluralism is a sham, for it does not follow that many sets of moral values can be equally correct, but that all sets of values are equally false

posing as true. We are left with moral and ethical relativism, and what follows is that fascists, social democrats, Catholics, neo-pagans, whoever, can all claim within a moral vacuum that their system of value is legitimate. We see this happen all the time in contemporary political society; a manifold of interest groups ranging from Hindus, Klan members, Marxist feminists, to the Amish all think their framework of interpretation and system of value is best. Frankly, the value pluralism model is propped up by moral relativism. If we uproot moral relativism to examine its foundation based on its own presuppositions, we find nothing—we find nihilism.

One can object to the value pluralism thesis. For instance, the value pluralist thesis cannot refute the monism hypothesis. At best, the value pluralism thesis simply presupposes the nonexistence of monism, that there is no unequivocally true set of moral and ethical values, while the fact of the matter is that monism is a live possibility, though the devil might be in identifying it. However, while there might be a best, unequivocally true set of values and way of life, because eros is a self-defeater, eros will never find fulfillment in this life even if we could identify the best system of value. While the problems of value pluralism and moral relativism are grave, it would seem that the problems of erotico-relativism are even graver. For if we could somehow remedy the former and find the true path, human eros by nature would remain fundamentally absurd, and by consequence the human experience as well. This poses a serious political problem, as we all seek to live well and be happy. We adopt philosophies and systems of value because we think they are true and because we think they will fulfill us. However, the erotico-relativism caused by the absurdity of eros makes value pluralism and moral relativism inviting, and in many ways the absurdity of human eros informs these relativistic philosophies in a meaningful way. This reading of eros paints the human condition as fundamentally tragic.

However, I refuse to leave the discussion on such a somber note. The key to overcoming this bleak picture of the human condition might lie in rethinking eros. Perhaps eros and desire are not self-contradictory, and perhaps my reading and reasoning has gone astray. We can see clearly what is at stake both privately and politically. Our reading of eros creates a sort of paradoxical vacuum where all models for constructive and destructive orderings of eros' objects are in some sense legitimate, in another sense illegitimate. All erotic models are legitimate insofar as they can claim to satisfy eros and bring happiness in some way. All erotic models are illegitimate insofar as none can claim to authentically satisfy eros and bring true happiness. This problem of

legitimacy and authenticity is a serious one, for this reading of eros and its relationship to human life must consistently grant equal credence to the most violent, destructive erotic models as well as those erotic models that are uplifting and constructive like Diotima's Ladder. The natural consequence of this erotico-relativism is widespread conflict of interests, which we see expressed in the nebulosity of desires that characterize the political body. As the body politic becomes increasing aware of erotico-relativism, this nebulosity seems to become increasingly violent as people seek to satisfy themselves through unconventional philosophies and outlets, especially violent ones.

Our reading of eros by no means signals for an abandonment of politics and recession into our caverns and Epicurean gardens.²⁵² Instead, if erotico-relativism indeed informs politics and perhaps explains its current volatility across the Western world, I invite if not implore my friends and colleagues to reflect on desire and eros in a serious manner. Though I do not have the final answers to these problems, I hope wholeheartedly that someone erudite can solve them. My final remarks on love and politics are by no means the final words.²⁵³ Although, if I am to leave my readers with any council, I can think of none better than to follow Socrates' lead at *Republic* 592a-b as the form of the West continues to degenerate.

²⁵² Catherine McKeen offers a good argument based on friendship for the philosopher to be politically involved. See Catherin McKeen, "“Standing Apart in the Shelter of the City Wall”: The Contemplative Ideal vs. The Politically Engaged Philosopher in Plato's Political Theory," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 48, no. 2 (2010), 197–216.

²⁵³ One might object to our observations on eros and reply that an objective good remedies the problems of eros. However, our argument remains unscathed. Our argument highlights the limits of human desire. An objectively good object of eros and a best system of value do not solve the problem of eros' nature as a self-defeater. The way to address our arguments seems to be to rethink the nature of eros. If eros does not stem from a painful lack in the soul, perhaps eros can be satisfied. However, can we conceive of eros as not stemming from a lack in the soul or otherwise?

Conclusion

After our analysis of eros within *Symposium*, Plato's own personal convictions about eros remain unclear. Plato's own thoughts remain unclear because *Symposium* is not the final discussion of eros in the dialogues. For instance, at *Phaedrus* 238b, Socrates offers a definition of eros. He says,

The unreasoning desire that overpowers a person's considered impulse to do right and is driven to take pleasure²⁵⁴ in beauty, its force reinforced by its kindred desires for beauty in human bodies—this desire, all-conquering in its forceful drive, takes its name from the word for force and is called *eros*.

Though Socrates offers a definition of eros, we cannot assume that this definition is Plato's own understanding of the desire. Instead, we would have to look at everything that Plato says about eros and desire within the dialogues. However, even if we were to read the other dialogues discussing eros, we would hit another brick wall. The concrete reason why Plato's own thoughts about eros remain unclear lies in the methodological observations that we outline throughout this thesis. The acceptance of these observations—one epistemological, a second about medium, a third about the *Seventh Letter*, and so on—confirms that we cannot and will not know whether it is the case that we know Plato's true thoughts about eros, or any of his private philosophical beliefs. For this reason and in accordance with the method we outline method, I avoid making any claims on Plato's behalf as much as possible throughout this entire project. I do not claim to

²⁵⁴ Because of the intricacy of the discussion, I have avoided discussing the relationship between eros, pleasure, beauty, good, and the respective forms of the latter two at any great length. Whether Plato considers pleasure a good, or whether pleasure merely has a share in a good, or whether pleasure has an ontological status respective to its relationship to its good, etc., is a discussion for another, more erudite, work. For some discussion on these issues, see Newell, *Passion*, 20, 62–63, 70–71, 75–77, 79; Mehmet M. Erginel, “Inconsistency and Ambiguity in *Republic IX*,” *Classical Quarterly*, vol. 62, no. 2 (2011), 493–520; “Plato on a Mistake about Pleasure,” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 44 (2006), 447–468; Ronald de Sousa, “Plato's *Philebus*,” *Topoi*, vol. 32 (2013), 125–128; Sylvain Delcomminette, “False Pleasure, “Appearance and Imagination in the “*Philebus*,”” *Phronesis*, vol. 48, no. 3 (2003), 215–237; George Harvey, “Techne and the Good in Plato's Statesman and *Philebus*,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 47, no. 1 (2009), 1–33; Robert C. Bartlett, “Plato's Critique of Hedonism in the “*Philebus*,”” *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 102, no. 1 (2008), 141–151; Dorothea Frede, “Rumpelstiltskin's Pleasures: True and False Pleasures in Plato's “*Philebus*,”” *Phronesis*, vol. 30, no. 2 (1985), 151–180; Cynthia Hampton, “Pleasure, Truth and Being in Plato's *Philebus*: A reply to Professor Frede,” *Phronesis*, vol. 32 (1987), 253–262; F. C. White, “Plato's Last Words on Pleasure,” *The Classical Quarterly*, vol. 51, no. 2 (2001), 458–476; Thomas M. Tuozzo, “The General Account of Pleasure in Plato's *Philebus*,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 34, no. 4 (1996), 495–513; Matthew Evans, “Plato's Rejection of Thoughtless and Pleasureless Lives,” *Phronesis*, 337–363; Gabriela Roxana Carone, “Hedonism and the Pleasureless Life in Plato's “*Philebus*,”” vol. 45, no. 4 (2000), 257–283; Carpenter, *Hedonistic Persons*, 5–26; De Chiara-Quenzer, *Method for Pleasure*, 37–55.

know how Plato understands eros or what he thinks about it, and I think that his understanding of eros is indefinitely different and richer than my own.

The aim of this thesis is to employ a methodology, the eclectic method, and encourage especially a way of reading, thinking, and speaking about Plato and his ideas. To demonstrate these methodological principles, we sought to enquire into the nature of eros, and perhaps encourage reflection on the nature of our own desires. I have made the effort to demonstrate exactly how open Plato's dialogues ultimately are, and how brilliantly elusive he is as a philosopher.²⁵⁵ In many ways, Plato is directly before us yet untouchable, encouraging thought and reflection on our most intimate experiences and convictions while his own thoughts remain brilliantly out of reach. For these reasons, I sought to encourage a reconsideration of how we use language when talking about Plato, his ideas, and our interpretations thereof. What I am calling for is academic and epistemic modesty so that we may answer the questions and concerns Plato presents before us together in an honest way. For I am of the mind that Plato does not want blind followers or interpreters. I am not convinced that Plato wants to be systematized. Instead, I think Plato and his dialogues encourage a kind of 'seeing' to pierce through the shrouding darkness of our opinions, and that he above all desires colleagues, mutual friends in philosophy, to join him in mutual pursuit of Truth.

²⁵⁵ "Every Platonic dialogue is a tangled web." Stanley Rosen, "Plato's Myth of the Reverse Cosmos," *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 33, no.1 (1979), 59.

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