

## The Treatment Of Poetry In The Symposium Of Plato

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The *Symposium* of Plato presents the demythologizing of the god *Eros*, that is, the rational clarification of his nature. At a dinner to celebrate the victory of the tragic poet Agathon in the Theatre, the guests all give speeches in honour of the god. Of the initial speakers, neither the comic poet Aristophanes nor the tragic poet Agathon can give more than a partial account of his nature, and it remains for Socrates, who has himself been taught the doctrine, to define it as the human desire for the eternal possession of the Beautiful. This done, the speech of Alcibiades shows the limits of Socrates' personal realization of this teaching and compels him to indicate the necessity of a new poetry, at once tragic and comic, that can more effectually present this philosophical view to the City.

The views of the two poets express dividedly what Socrates, as taught by a certain Diotima, can bring into one view. While Aristophanes sees in *eros* an impetus toward a restored human wholeness, Agathon identifies it with the universal Beauty. The view of each poet is meant by Plato to represent, moreover, the general tendency of his genre; independently of philosophy, then, both Tragedy and Comedy have gathered up the many gods and heroes of the poetical religion of the Greeks into a single view of divinity and humanity, respectively.

Thus the philosophical treatment of *eros* both arises in relation to poetry and is at once the correction and completion of poetry. Any division, therefore, of the dialogue into a philosophical centre and a poetical and historical husk, is not true to the purpose of Plato. The dialogue falls into five main divisions, of unequal length. The first shows Apollodorus agreeing to the request of his friend that he narrate the speeches about *eros* given on the occasion of Agathon's first tragic victory. In the second, Apollodorus begins his repetition of the account of Aristodemus, who with Socrates attended the famous dinner. The third part presents the actual speeches, concluding with that of Socrates. The fourth relates the arrival of Alcibiades and his account of Socrates. The fifth shows Socrates' reflections on the unification of the writing of Comedy and Tragedy.

.I.

The dialogue begins (172-4)<sup>1</sup> with a discussion between a certain Apollodorus and an unnamed friend, who wishes to know about the speeches given on the subject of *eros* at the house of Agathon. This conversation anticipates the argument of the whole. Apollodorus is a friend of Socrates; he regards philosophizing as the most important activity in the world and thinks everyone wretched except Socrates. He pities those who devote themselves to wealth and moneymaking, such as his current companion. The companion does not wish to dispute with Apollodorus but to hear an accurate account of the speeches on *Eros*. Together with his practical interests, he has a real, but indistinct, desire to know about *eros*, and thus in the context of the whole dialogue, to know the Beautiful as well. Apollodorus agrees to oblige him, and since he was not present, he will repeat the account that he heard from a then disciple of Socrates and subsequently checked with Socrates himself. The sharp division between Apollodorus and his friend presages the division between Socrates and Alcibiades at the end of the dialogue.

The first part of the dialogue shows the reader through a directly presented conversation that he will learn about the speeches on *Eros* through an indirect narration. This is necessary in order to present the speeches universally, as possibilities of thought, and not as merely contingent conversation. In so doing, Plato follows the example of the drama, where the very existence of a theatre, the realities of staging, and the solemnity of the occasion, make of the drama something existing in its own right, which the spectators attend. Because he is writing a dialogue, conversation between characters has a directness that only narration of a past occurrence can correct.

## .II.

As the second part of the dialogue (174a2-178a5) begins, Apollodorus retells Aristodemus' account of what happened. Socrates appears here as a man oriented toward the *kalon* (the Beautiful). When Aristodemus first encounters him, he sees Socrates freshly bathed and wearing sandals, which latter he rarely did. When asked, Socrates replies that he wishes to go as a beautiful man to a beautiful man. Here is seen the most external and sensible manifestation of that *kalon* which is the subject of the dialogue. Before reaching Agathon's house, moreover, Socrates shows his deeper relation to it when he falls into a meditative trance on a neighbouring porch; in light of the whole dialogue, Socrates presumably is contemplating the universal *kalon*.

Socrates' developing relation to the *kalon* also permits him to invite his friend Aristodemus to the dinner. Modifying an old proverb, he says, the good (*agathoi*) go unbidden to the house of Agathon for dinner (174b4-5). Socrates observes as well that Homer has not respected the proverb, by presenting Menelaos, the lesser warrior, as going uninvited to the feast of his brother Agamemnon, the better warrior. This invitation and the discussion accompanying it indicate in an anticipatory way the relation between poetry and philosophy that the dialogue will develop. Agathon is a poet, and the dialogue will identify the *agathon* with the *kalon*. Since Aristodemus and Socrates spend their time in philosophy, their more comprehensive relation to the *agathon* give them a certain

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<sup>1</sup> All parenthetical references are to the pagination of *Symposium* in the Oxford Classical Text of Plato.

precedence over a poet. Socrates even permits himself a criticism of Homer and a modification of the proverb. Philosophy will appear later in the dialogue as the true measure of poetry.

When Aristodemus arrives at the house of Agathon, he notices that Socrates is no longer with him but stands on a neighbour's porch, absorbed in intellectual reflection. Agathon welcomes Aristodemus with great urbanity, saying that he had tried to find him in order to invite him but without success. Aristodemus takes his place at the feast, and he prevents Agathon from sending a servant to rouse Socrates from his contemplation. When Socrates finally arrives, Agathon requests that he sit by him. Agathon hopes, he says, that by touching Socrates he might benefit from the wisdom that he has just acquired in his contemplation. The poet seems to hold a physical view of wisdom, as is brought out by Socrates' reply: if wisdom could flow from the fuller to the emptier, he says, then he would benefit greatly from that of Agathon, which manifested itself before so many Greeks at the tragic festival the day before.

Agathon tells Socrates that he is insolent and that the two shall be judged by Dionysus as juror (175e7-9). Agathon realizes that Socrates' seeming praise of his wisdom is more likely a sharp disparagement of it. His thought that Dionysus will judge between them is an extension of the Greek idea of the god. Both Tragedy and Comedy were presented and judged under the auspices of Dionysus. Agathon suggests that the same god will judge between the two of them, one a poet and the other a philosopher. After dinner, this extension of the Dionysiac spirit more clearly presents itself when the guests consider how they are to spend the rest of the evening. They decide unanimously against heavy drinking, the least intellectual expression of that spirit. Instead, in wonder at the lack of speeches in honour of the god *Eros*, they agree each to give a speech to proclaim his excellence.

Like every Greek god, this one has a two-fold reality. On the one hand, he is depicted in human form as having his own subjectivity and individuality. On the other, he represents a tendency of the human soul. For example, in the first book of the *Iliad*, Athena appears to Achilles, to prevent his drawing his sword to kill Agamemnon. According to the poet, the goddess appears *in propria persona*, yet it is also clear from the fact of Athena's appearing, and not Aphrodite, or Apollo, that she also represents his exercise of his own prudence. This duality is even more manifest in *eros*, which is at once the proper name of a god and also a common noun meaning love or desire. Thus a full definition of *eros* would have to give an account of this duality. In so doing, philosophy will develop a tendency already present in poetry, since it belonged to both Tragedy and Comedy to clarify this duality in the gods.

In Tragedy this occurs on the side of the gods, and in Comedy from the side of humanity. Tragedy tends to unify the unclear division between divine individuality and human reality by moving toward the presentation of a unified divinity and a human subjectivity which recedes, as it were, into this one god. This occurs when the human hero's action attempts to bring everything under the measure of his own *pathos*, that is, the aspect of life in the *polis* that he regards as uniquely central. In so doing, he collides

with a *pathos* of equal weight. The result of this collision is the revelation of Zeus as what underlies this division, and the hero's finding in that discovery the limit of his own subjectivity. At the end of the *Women of Trachis*, for example, it is declared that nothing we have seen is not Zeus. When Heracles proposes to remake the family by introducing his mistress into his household, his previously passive wife hopes by magic to re-direct his desire to her. When the magic proves instead the destruction of her husband, she kills herself in heroic restitution. Conversely, the great hero, accustomed to activity, accepts the fatality of the magic-turned-poison, and has himself burnt by his own son, as an offering. Each character has experienced the whole range of passivity and activity, and this is Zeus. Each perishes at the moment of completion, and in their perishing, the one reality underlying all things is manifested.

In Comedy, however, the emphasis lies in the gathering together of the various divinities by the individual subject, with the result that he can unite the various moments of the divine world more thoroughly than any particular god. In the *Birds* of Aristophanes, for example, the hero through his flight from the city of Athens to a natural religion and *polis* of his own devising, has an experience of that realm more directly than any Olympian god, with his fixed rational superiority to the natural order, can have. Then when the hero returns from this nature religion to a human city and the Olympian religion, he has a total experience of the moments, both natural and spiritual, of that religion. Neither Zeus, nor Prometheus nor Heracles can have an experience of equal universality. Thus the play ends with the proclamation of the hero as the highest of divinities.

### .III.

The third part of the dialogue then relates the five speeches, each of which attempts to clarify the nature of *eros*. The first two assume the homosexual *eros* of upper-class Athens, while the third offers a scientific-philosophical account. The last two present the views of the comic and tragic poets. The first is that of Phaedrus (178a6-180b8), who had suggested the idea of the speeches. His account does little to illuminate the nature of the god. He first indicates the excellence of *eros* by citing the authority of Hesiod in *Theogony* for his being among the eldest of the gods, This does not go far in showing the greatness of the god, since in Hesiod the earlier gods are the least in honour, and the later the greater. The Titanic powers are born first, and the Olympians, the gods who most describe the realm of intelligence and spirit, come later. Phaedrus' limited beginning is matched also by the account he gives of what human relation the god encourages. He says that for a young man nothing is better than a good lover, and for a lover nothing better than a beloved. In this he follows the homosexual custom of the upper classes at Athens.<sup>2</sup> A lover, he says, would be ashamed to do something cowardly for fear of his

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<sup>2</sup> A sharp division must be drawn between contemporary male homosexuality in North America and the love of men for other men in ancient Athens. North American homosexuality is an alternative to family life, while amongst the Athenians it was a subjective friendship in addition to the objective institutions of the family and state. It arose primarily because friendship between a man and a woman was generally not possible, and it rarely precluded a man's eventually marrying. It often involved a liaison between a youth and an older man; those such as Agathon, who did not marry and continued with their (older) male lovers,

beloved's bad opinion. He argues, moreover, that no relationship encourages courage so much as does this homosexual *eros*, and historically this kind of bond did obtain at Thebes.<sup>3</sup>

In this speech, the relation of the good aimed at to the means proposed is not at all clear. The good that *eros* is said to induce is courage or military valour, but this bears no real relation to the sensuous love of a handsome young man, except a perhaps somewhat accidental one. Fearing the disapproval of such a young man might move one to valour, but courage is not dependent on such a love, nor need such a love give rise to valour. While only the merest of beginnings, nevertheless the speech is an anticipation of a fuller development in the subsequent speeches, which will give a deeper account of the nature of a lover and what he loves.

The next speech, that of Pausanias (180c4-185c3), stays within the ambit of homosexual love between a man and a youth, while making some distinction between natural and intelligible goods. He distinguishes, at the divine level, between the *Eros* who is the son of Aphrodite Pandemos, and another who is the son of the "heavenly Aphrodite." Each *eros* is worshipped by a different class of men, one class which pursues the young and even women only from physical desire, and the other that looks to a deeper friendship with the object of its *eros*. Pausanias thinks that this second class only is worthy of the name *eros*. In this case, a man is attracted to a youth who is not only handsome but also capable of mental development. An exchange develops between the two, in which the youth 'gratifies' the man and the latter, who is already virtuous, educates the youth in virtue and wisdom. The goods of virtue and physical pleasure are very imperfectly unified here, and the relation a very peculiar kind of prostitution. The older partner has presumably acquired virtue in some more rigorous school and is willing to barter it for the lesser good. The younger will submit himself to the older in exchange for education.

The next speech, that of Eryximachus (180c4-185c3), removes *eros* from the realm of the love of two persons and praises it instead as a general cosmic principle. *Eros* is that harmony that obtains in the right ordering of the whole cosmos, whether the domain of nature, man or the relation of men and gods. In each of these realms, the work of *eros* is to reconcile opposite forces or tendencies. From the standpoint of the whole, then, there is not a proper distinction amongst the realms of nature, men, and the gods, if one *eros* can univocally be said to govern them all. Thus the predominantly human character of *eros* is thereby lost sight of. Nevertheless, by making *eros* a cosmic as well as human principle, the speech raises the discussion beyond the pedestrian level assumed by those speakers who limit themselves to the current Athenian social order.

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were often the subject of sharp ridicule. Aristophanic Comedy treated all sexual relations between men as sensual excess.

These relationships were neither punished nor approved. An Olympian deity, Aphrodite, presided over the attraction between a man and a woman even in cases such as Helen and Paris where this led to the destruction of the family. No god existed to give objective form to anything so merely fleeting and subjective as passion and love between men.

<sup>3</sup> One band of Theban soldiers in the 4th c. was composed entirely of pairs of lovers.

With the next two speakers, the argument presents accounts of *eros* from both a comic and a tragic poet. In the context of the whole dialogue, they express views that stand on ground more similar to that of philosophy than any of the views heretofore expressed. Both present a total, comprehensive view of *eros*, and dividedly the two poets express what Diotima will presently unite. The two poets express their views in prose, of course; they are thus presented as indicating in speeches the same outlook that their plays had expressed as poetry. Whether it is historically possible for poets thus to explicate their ideas need not detain us. What is indicated here is that this transformation of poetry is possible as part of the expression of a philosophical idea. Thus it belongs to the dialogue to show not only that poetry is less comprehensive than philosophy in content, but that this is so in form and manner of expression as well.<sup>4</sup>

The speech of Aristophanes (189-193d5) comes after that of Eryximachus, and it locates *eros* in the attempt of men and women to restore the human wholeness lost in a rebellion against the gods. This Platonic Aristophanes posits three genera of humans, one composed of two men joined together, another of two women joined together, and a third of a man and woman joined together.<sup>5</sup> When these attempted to lead a rebellion against the Olympian gods, Zeus punished all three kinds by dividing them into two. Ever since, each half has been trying to find its other half, and from this has arisen the current division of mankind into those men who love other men, those women who love other women, and those men and women who love members of the opposite sex. This yearning, says Aristophanes, together with due reverence toward the gods, can lead through *eros* to a restoration of his original wholeness for everyone. This speech of Aristophanes marks a significant advance on the previous speeches. It has a deep sense of the incompleteness of human nature. It further ties the overcoming of that incompleteness to a subjective completeness connected to reverence for the gods.

This Platonic Aristophanes, however, is not an adequate portrait of the comic poet whose dramas we have. Plato is accurate in depicting the poet as one who looks to see the overcoming of man's dividedness within and against himself. Yet it is very difficult to see that this lies in the mythical dividedness of the genera that Plato's Aristophanes begins with. Rather, each play begins with the ruin of the good order of the *polis*, as this has shown itself in one of the essential spheres of the *polis*. The search for human wholeness goes beyond what would normally be regarded as 'reverence for the gods.' In *Birds* explicitly, and all the plays thereafter, humanity is seen as capable of a deeper union of

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<sup>4</sup> A philosophical examination of the limits of poetry is not the first occasion amongst the Greeks on which one form of knowing seeks to examine another. The whole of Greek poetry is in one way a discussion and amplification of the whole system of myths and cults belonging to the Greek religion. Perhaps, however, it is in Comedy par excellence that one form of poetry examines another. *Frogs* shows the god Dionysus journeying to the underworld, to bring back his favourite poet, Euripides. Once in Hades he is faced with the deeper task of determining who is the better tragedian, Euripides or Aeschylus. A comic poet has thus devoted an entire play to considering the nature of Tragedy, and in doing so he helps to indicate the nature of Comedy as well the comic poet has not restricted himself to a critique of Tragedy. In *Clouds*, Socrates is treated as a sophist, and in exposing the effects of Socrates on a representative Athenian family, Aristophanes poetically considers the nature of sophism.

<sup>5</sup> Why Plato thinks it reasonable to ascribe this view to Aristophanes is not at all clear. Nothing in the extant plays justifies it.

rational and natural elements than even the gods themselves. What Plato perhaps has in mind is the earlier play *Clouds*, where the limit to sophism is a necessary reverence for the gods.<sup>6</sup>

After the speech of Aristophanes comes that of Agathon, the tragic poet (194e3-197e8) whose victory in Tragedy the evening is celebrating. He gives a long rhetorical speech, the burden of which is that *Eros* is that god who, being most beautiful and best, is the cause of beauty and goodness for all others possessing them. This is, of course, the opposite standpoint to that of Aristophanes, who saw the origin of *eros* rather in the need to restore a lost human wholeness.

All the necessary elements of the philosophical analysis are now present. The idea of a universal cause of the beautiful and good has appeared, although wrongly identified with *eros*. The idea of a yearning for wholeness has also appeared, although identified with a mythological sense of what defines personhood. In the total view of the dialogue, two things are necessary at this stage: the general elements of the comprehensive philosophical view must appear here and they must appear dividedly, that is, between Tragedy and Comedy, and obscured somewhat by the poetical form in which they appear. While this division is necessary to the argument of the dialogue, it is no clearer that Plato has a more accurate view of Tragedy than he does of Aristophanic Comedy. Since we do not have a complete play of Agathon, it is difficult to say whether Plato has an accurate view of him in particular. For the argument of the dialogue to show a right relation between the realms of philosophy and poetry, however, Agathon must in some way represent Tragedy as a whole.

In the view of the dialogue as a whole, Agathon (and thus Tragedy) has confounded the human desire for what it does not have with that very Beauty and Good that it desires. To the extent that every tragic hero in a certain way identifies his *pathos* with the highest Good, this is true. For example, Agamemnon, the generalissimo of the Greeks at Troy has imagined that he can sacrifice the rights of his own family by offering his daughter Iphigeneia to the gods. He renews his excess by trying to introduce Cassandra into his household and by walking on purple, which is reserved for Zeus. In *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus acts as if he were not only the saviour of the city at an earlier time but again will be its saviour, arrogating to himself thereby what belongs to the gods. However, while Tragedy might begin with the assertion of an identity between a particular human being and the highest good, it most certainly does not end there. As in the examples given, both Agamemnon and Oedipus eventually fall and their dependence on the gods is rather revealed, so in Tragedy generally.

When the point has been reached where Agathon confuses *eros* with the very Beauty that it seeks, Socrates can begin that questioning of Agathon which is the beginning of the full Platonic exposition. When Socrates asks Agathon if in fact *eros* is the *eros* of

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<sup>6</sup> A certain Strepsiades wishes to escape his debts by sending his son to learn sophistry at Socrates' 'Thinking Shop.' The son not only confounds his creditors with what he has learned there, he proposes to beat his father and mother as well. Strepsiades repents of what he has done and acknowledges that lack of reverence for the gods has led him to sophistry in the first place.

something (199d1-2) he has simultaneously demythologized *eros* and shown that it cannot be complete in itself. In the first instance *eros* is not a god but human desire, in the broad sense. And as desire it cannot possess what it in fact desires. Thus the whole elaborate rhetorical edifice of Agathon falls, and the simple elements of the philosophical analysis have their first statement: a true analysis of *eros* involves human desire and its objects.

Since *eros* is of something and does not possess what it desires, it is neither beautiful nor good. Having established this point, Socrates can narrate to them an account of *eros* told him by a certain wise woman, Diotima. Socrates says that when she began to instruct him, he held a view similar to Agathon's, that *eros* was a great god and was himself something beautiful. She questioned him, just as he has Agathon, and a dialogue about the nature of *eros* ensued.

While Diotima is, historically speaking, a fiction, her presence indicates Socrates' relation to philosophy. He does not know the truth about *eros* until she has taught him. Moreover, through her Plato wishes to show the objective truth of what Socrates teaches the others. Philosophical truth, like poetry, is not the opining of an individual but an inspired knowledge granted the philosopher. In this, Socrates stands on similar ground with the poets.

Socrates reports that he was very surprised to learn that *eros* was not beautiful and imagined that it must therefore be ugly (201e8-9). Diotima replied that in this case, as many other cases of opposites, such as wisdom and ignorance, there is an in-between, and that *eros* is of this class of beings, neither good nor bad but between the two. This distinction then allows Diotima to specify further its status when Socrates repeats the common opinion that *eros* is a great god (202b6-203a8). Since a god of necessity is both blessed and beautiful, *eros* cannot be a god. Rather, in accord with its intermediary status, it is a *daimon*. This class of being communicates the things of god to men, and vice-versa; it thus makes possible prayers, sacrifice and prophecy. Since god does not mix with men, it makes possible all association and dialogue between gods and men. Thus the earlier account of *eros* as intermediate given by Eryximachus has now been given its proper form.

Socrates at this point asked Diotima from what mother and father *eros* has come. She answers, in a philosophical myth, that *eros* is the child of Poverty and Providing (203b1-204a1). This myth is both a necessary conclusion to the argument heretofore and adds little to the purely philosophical discussion. Because Socrates (and earlier Agathon) had wrongly thought that *eros* was a great god, Diotima had to define 'god' in order to show Socrates' error. In defining 'god' as that which possesses the beautiful which *eros* was said to lack, she offered a rational and philosophical clarification of the poetical theology. Her definition of a *daimon* is a similar clarification. Having established *eros* as an intermediary between gods and men, Diotima now puts into mythical form the arguments she has already made. According to the nature of his mother, *eros* lacks the good, but according to the nature of his father, he always possesses it.



This intermediate character means that *eros* is between ignorance and wisdom and is thus a philosopher or 'lover of wisdom.' Neither a god nor any one else who is wise is a lover of wisdom, for he already is wise. On the other hand, the ignorant man does not know that he lacks knowledge and thus cannot desire what he is ignorant of. Since there is a wisdom of the most beautiful, and *eros* desires the beautiful, *eros* is a philosopher. This intermediate character has arisen from his parents, Poros ("Providing") and Penia ("Poverty"). Ignorance of this intermediate character arose, Diotima says (204c1-6), because Socrates identified *eros* with the object of love and not the one loving. In reality, the object loved is beautiful and complete, while the one loving is lacking.

Diotima's argument heretofore has corrected the wrong assumption of Agathon (and Socrates) that *eros* is a great god. This clarification made, Diotima asks Socrates to define more clearly what one means by the desire of the Beautiful. In desiring beautiful and good things, Socrates says, one desires that they exist for one and that one is blessed as a result. Diotima then concludes that it belongs to all men that they desire good things for themselves always (205a5-7). If *eros* thus defines human happiness, it defines the nature of human life. This view, however, contradicts every-day use of language, whereby we speak of some men as loving and others as not. Usage, however, in the case of the word *poiesis* ["making"] as well, applies a generic name to one particular species: while all crafts are properly called *poieseis*, its name has been applied to only those who concern themselves with music and metre.

Diotima then emphasizes her view that *eros* is of the good by contrasting it with the view, earlier expressed by Aristophanes, that it is of the whole (205d10-e5). She indicates the limits of this view by saying that men are often willing to cut off their hands and feet if they regard them as wicked. Diotima also refutes another possible interpretation of Aristophanes' view, that men are seeking for their original subjective wholeness. This is possible, she says, only if the good be defined as one's own, and another's as evil. This first statement, that men love the good, is not, continues Diotima, a sufficient statement of the matter. Since they desire it for themselves, the manner in which they pursue it must next be investigated. They desire the good to be for themselves always. The work by which they pursue it is a 'begetting' in the beautiful both according to the body and the soul (206b7-8).

Socrates replies to Diotima that he finds what she has said bewildering, and she agrees to explain further (206c1-207a4). All human beings conceive both in body and soul. They can give birth only in the beautiful and not in the ugly. Thus *eros* is not simply of the beautiful but rather of 'begetting and offspring in the beautiful.' This begetting gives man a share in immortality, and this sharing is necessary to *eros* if, as was agreed, it is the desire of the good's always being for oneself.

Diotima then asks what the cause of 'this *eros* and this desire' is (207a5-6). She indicates the depth of the question by showing how even animals are moved by a desire for immortality. Not only do they mate, but will suffer everything for the sake of their offspring. Reasoning, she says, would be a sufficient explanation to make sense of this phenomenon in men but is not sufficient for animals. When Socrates replies that he

cannot explain it, she recalls him to the view of *eros* earlier agreed to. Every mortal nature seeks as much as it can to be always and deathless. This seeking of immortality arises out of the essential changeableness of mortal natures, both in the body and the soul. Mortal natures do not possess sameness in the way that divine natures do. Divine natures are simply the same. In mortal natures, however, sameness results in one part of the body perishing, such as hair, for example, and new hair coming to be. This is true even of knowledge, which both vanishes and is recalled in memory. So while divine sameness is true sameness, mortal natures partake in this sameness by the constant dying and replacement of their several parts. Mortal natures thus partake in the eternal.

To Socrates in his wonderment at such a view, Diotima replies that an analysis of the human love of honour will show its truth (208c1-208e1). To secure deathless glory, men are willing to spend their money and even to die on behalf of those to whom they are attached. She instances both the willingness of Achilles to die for Patroclus and Alcestis for Admetus. The first speech of all had given these as examples of the virtue induced by an *eros* for a beloved. Diotima has now shown that this kind of devotion can arise only from a love of the deathless. She then expands the argument to say that all men do all things on behalf of a deathless virtue and a 'famous reputation.' There is as well a hierarchy of what various men will do. The primary division is between those who look for immortality according to the body, and those who seek it according to a begetting in their souls. The first class is erotic primarily in relation to women, and find in the begetting of children a means of perpetuating themselves. Another class of men conceives and begets rather in the soul than the body (209a1-209d6); this class begets all that belongs to virtue, the prudence by which an individual is governed, and that moderation and justice which order families and cities. When a man well-disposed to virtue comes of age, he seeks a man of noble soul, and associating together they speak of virtue and what a man should do and be. In the formation of this friendship the friends have a friendship deeper than that of physical children, having in common more beautiful and more deathless children. Historically, the poets, who are begetters of individual virtue, have had greater than human children, as in the cases of Homer and Hesiod. Similarly, the great law-givers who have preserved great cities have proven to be greater than usual fathers.

Diotima says that even Socrates can understand the two kinds of begetting in the beautiful, one of the body and the other of the soul, as the two means whereby men aim at immortality. But the final 'mysteries' for the sake of which these exist, are more difficult. Diotima presents the final ascent of a man to the Beautiful, beginning with the love of a beautiful body, and ending with the love of the Beautiful itself (210a4-212a7). In the love of a beautiful body, one begets 'beautiful words' and moves to the love of the beauty that is present in all bodies. From this, one ascends to the love of soul as more beautiful than bodies and is moved to discourse about what will make the young better. This necessarily leads to one's looking at the beauty present in institutions, and to see this beauty as deeper than that in bodies. From this, one ascends to the beauty of the various 'sciences,' which enables one to look at not this or that particular which is beautiful, but at the whole sea of beauty and thereby to beget noble philosophical discourse. From here, he proceeds to the remarkable knowledge of Beauty itself, unchangeable, eternal, and invariable, not as

present in any particular, whether sensible or intelligible, but as it is in itself, and in which all particular examples participate according to their being subject both to coming to be and being destroyed. This knowledge of the Beautiful then, is the true goal of a 'paederasty' rightly undertaken, in which one rises from the love of beautiful bodies, to beautiful institutions, and thence to beautiful forms of knowing to a vision of the beautiful itself. If ever this last is attained, it will no longer seem reasonable to be amazed at the handsome youths who occupy men's attention.

Diotima concludes by saying how excellent is the life of him who sees the Beautiful, and that to this man it belongs to beget not images of virtue but virtue itself. To the attainment of this end, says Socrates, no one could find a better helper than *eros*. For this reason, he says, he both practices 'the erotic' and commends it to other men.

#### .IV.

To Socrates, it has been granted to know the true nature of *eros* by an inspiration that has exceeded his own knowledge. The remainder of the dialogue then considers how this knowledge can become real in men so that they might both conceive and bear in the Beautiful. A speech by the newly arrived Alcibiades <sup>7</sup>

indicates the conditions that would make this possible. Neither the abstraction of Socrates from all particular involvement nor the frenzied involvement of Alcibiades, which ends in a yearning for indifference, provides the necessary solution; the sharp division, however, points to a resolution. Thus the last 'scene' of the dialogue shows Socrates arguing with Agathon and Aristophanes that the same person should be able to write Tragedy as well as Comedy. Such a person would both know and teach the grounding of human activity in the Beautiful. His art would be the true *paideia* of mankind.

The occasion for this encounter with Alcibiades is the sudden arrival of the latter shortly after the speech of Socrates has ended (212d3). That he is both clearly drunk and wearing the headbands of a devotee of Dionysus recall us to the religious and poetical setting of the entire discussion. Agathon has just been triumphant in the tragic part of the festival just ended, and Alcibiades has come to crown him for his victory. The speeches just concluded have shown that only philosophy can know truly the role of the god Dionysus, the communication of divine life to men, and this as mediated through *eros*.

As soon, however, as Alcibiades discovers that Socrates is present, his whole purpose is changed. Having already crowned Agathon as victor, he crowns Socrates as well, who he says can conquer everyone in *logoi* (213d8-e5). It is then agreed that as Alcibiades' part in the evening's discussions, he will praise Socrates, and he practically dares Socrates to find any part of his recital false. In fact, Socrates sits silent through the whole of it.

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<sup>7</sup> Alcibiades (450-404) was an Athenian general and statesman. Raised in the family of Pericles, he persuaded the Athenians to undertake their most expansive operation of the Peloponnesian War, the Sicilian Expedition, and was put in command of it. A charge of impiety recalled him from the field, and he fled to Sparta. Although he did return to Athens, the machinations of his enemies caused him to seek sanctuary with the Persians. He was killed there with the connivance of both Athens and Sparta.

Alcibiades says initially of Socrates that while his exterior offers nothing remarkable, inside he possesses divine treasure, and that he has a power in words and argument possessed by no one else, not even the great orators of the day such as Pericles. His power of words awakens in Alcibiades a sense that his life is not worth living, that rather than devote himself to the care of his soul, instead he devotes himself to the affairs of the Athenians. The power of Socrates has alone been able, says Alcibiades, to make him feel shame before anyone. A discussion with Socrates in which he has agreed to surrender his devotion to the merely external will then be followed by his being seduced by the honour offered by the many; and in the face of this contradiction, Alcibiades feels shame (216b3-b6).

Alcibiades locates Socrates' power in his indifference to things prized by the many, such as possessions and wealth, and in considering his fellow citizens to be worth nothing (216d7-e4). The remainder of his speech is devoted to detailing his own dealings with Socrates, with the end in mind of revealing the remarkable self-possession of Socrates, which Alcibiades can only marvel at. Their association began when Alcibiades was still a youth, much admired, he says, for his personal beauty, and the object of that *eros* outlined in the first of the speeches above. Although Socrates talked with him, even wrestled with him, he never behaved toward him as a lover to his beloved. Alcibiades then undertook what can only be described as a campaign to gain the attentions of Socrates. Intimate dinners, sleeping in the same bed with him, all failed. Even when Alcibiades made an explicit offer of his charms in exchange for Socrates' educating him, he was refused. Socrates even went so far as to say that if he had in himself the kind of beauty that Alcibiades imagined he had, he (Socrates) would suffer from the exchange of something noble for something far more common. Thus Socrates is altogether free of that confusion which marked the speech of Pausanias.

At this point was formed the attitude that seems to have moved Alcibiades henceforward. Although he felt that he had been dishonoured by Socrates, nevertheless it was impossible for him not to admire his courage and self-possession (219d3-7). Of the latter, Alcibiades then gives several instances, which he himself witnessed while they were fighting together during Athenian military campaigns. Twice he observed Socrates' absolute coolness under fire, and always Socrates seemed completely indifferent to the hardships soldiers must endure. He could out-drink everyone and yet never be drunk. On one occasion when Socrates had saved a wounded Alcibiades, and the generals wished to honour Alcibiades, despite his efforts to see Socrates honoured, Socrates was more desirous that Alcibiades should receive the award. Alcibiades was also a witness to Socrates' celebrated contemplative abstractions, which enabled him, despite the weather, to stand lost in thought for long period of time.

Alcibiades concludes his praise of Socrates by declaring his absolute originality amongst men, both now and before. No one can equal him either in his self-possession or in his discourses. Finally, he adds that in relation to the youth, rather than his pursuing them, as a lover does his beloved, they become the lovers. He thus advises Agathon to beware lest he suffer what Alcibiades and many others have suffered.

.V.

The speech of Alcibiades brings out an extreme division between him and Socrates, in the context of the "begetting in the beautiful" which had concluded Diotima's account of *eros*. Neither Socrates nor Alcibiades has achieved this begetting, but the opposing ways in which they have failed to do so indicates to Socrates how it would be possible. Neither Socrates' abstracted self-possession in the midst of his activity nor Alcibiades' confused devotion to certain goods followed by a shamed wish to renounce them, defines the begetting in the beautiful. In neither is there a love of the beautiful that brings forth beauties in its train.

Only in a reformed poetry written by a poet of philosophical insight can Socrates see the true begetter in the beautiful. Thus, shortly after the speech of Alcibiades and the entry of further revelers, Socrates tries to compel both Agathon and Aristophanes to agree that one poet ought to be capable of both Tragedy- and Comedy-making (223d3-6). Since the Platonic Aristophanes and Agathon, in their speeches above, only dividedly taught the doctrine that Diotima taught, the reformed poetry would supposedly teach that whole doctrine. Thus it would indicate the individual's discovery of the Beautiful as the ground of an activity that subsisted together with it. This would at once correct Agathon's collapsing of the distinction between the individual and the Beautiful and Aristophanes' attempt to show an individuality not entirely grounded in the Beautiful, but yet dependent on it in its search for wholeness.

This reformed poetry would exist for the education of the City, as both the Tragic and Comic Festivals, in their divided teaching, already did. It would thus teach all the citizens a complete account of their human nature, in its true ground. Poetry, as thus purified by philosophical teaching, would finally attain its true goal.

Socrates has achieved this last view not directly through Diotima but in his own reflection on it. It thus represents that 'begetting in the beautiful' which has heretofore eluded him. It completes that tendency which marked the beginning of the dialogue, where Socrates had attained the Beautiful in its external form, as made beautiful for a beautiful man. Through the teaching of Diotima, he has learned the nature of the begetting in the beautiful, and finally in his attempt to persuade the poets of the need for a reformed poetry, he has himself begotten in the Beautiful.

Therefore, this final scene of the dialogue is at once the logical conclusion of the dialogue, and its limit. It completes the development of Socrates' relation to the beautiful, with which it had begun; it thereby shows the potential re-making, on a philosophical basis, of that poetry whose limits were the occasion for the arising of a philosophical view of *eros*. This transformation of poetry begins by its being restated in the form of *logoi* by the comic and tragic poets. Comedy and Tragedy can then appear as dividedly presenting the elements that form the view of *eros* presented by Diotima. When she has defined the goal of *eros* as a 'begetting in the beautiful,' then the necessity for transforming the content itself of poetry concludes the dialogue.

However, the reformed poetry that the dialogue says must exist, does not yet exist, and if the above remarks questioning Plato's view of both Tragedy and Comedy be true, cannot exist. It was argued above that Tragedy and Comedy present radically opposite views, the one emphasizing the divine as that to which all things return, the other declaring that humanity is far more capable than any divinity of unifying the moments of the Greek religion. Diotima's account of *eros* does not fully contain either the tragic or the comic idea. Her account of the Beautiful does not so radically unite humanity with it as does god in Tragedy. Nor does her human individual so thoroughly make himself master of the divine moments as does the individual of Comedy. Thus Plato's inability to fully comprehend Tragedy and Comedy is the limit of *Symposium*.