

1

General Introduction

The phenomenon of erotic love,¹ the love that is originally connected with sexual desire but is able to transcend that origin and reach even the heights of religious ecstasy, is dealt with extensively in two of Plato's most impressive dialogues, the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*. These two dialogues deal with both the earthy origins and the spiritual heights of erotic love. The *Symposium* is a report of a series of speeches about erotic love given at a dinner party, and the *Phaedrus* is a conversation about making speeches that includes several examples of speeches on erotic love. Various aspects of erotic love are also illustrated in the dramatic action in both dialogues.

The *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* are striking in their philosophical content as well as in their literary quality. They provide an excellent basis for discussing Platonic philosophy in general because they include substantial treatment of many of the major themes in Plato's works. They also provide an excellent basis for considering the question of how to read Plato's dialogues because they contain particularly good examples of the characteristics that have led to recent controversies about what sort of texts these dialogues are.

Plato's dialogues are traditionally divided into three groups, representing chronological divisions of Plato's writing career. Although the groupings are primarily justified by considerations of technical matters of linguistic usage,² the dialogues in each group share some general characteristics: 1) In the early group, the dialogues are shorter, less complex dramatically, and characterized by an apparent failure to find a satisfactory answer to the question raised in the discussion, which is usually of the "What is X?" variety. Examples of early period dialogues are the *Laches* (What is courage?), the *Charmides* (What is judiciousness?), and the *Euthyphro* (What is religiousness?). 2) In the longer, middle-period dialogues, there are positive defenses of philosophical positions and very complex dramatic structures. The *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* fall into this period. The *Phaedo* is another excellent example of this group. It is a conversation between Socrates and his friends in the prison cell after Socrates' conviction at his trial. They discuss immortality, and

Socrates seems to conclude that the final argument they examine is a sound proof that human souls are immortal. The dialogue ends with Socrates' death from drinking poison. Other well-known middle-period dialogues are the *Republic* and the *Protagoras*. 3) In the late period, the dialogues are longer, but lack dramatic complexity, and tend to be careful analyses of relatively technical questions. For example, the *Theaetetus* examines several proposed definitions of knowledge, although it finds none of them satisfactory; the *Sophist* elaborates at great length on the definition of a Sophist, making a number of epistemological, metaphysical, and linguistic claims in passing; and the *Parmenides* examines possible interpretations of unity and plurality after raising some objections to a particular version of the doctrine of forms, the ultimate principles of reality that are the objects of knowledge in the highest sense.

The middle-period dialogues *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* have much in common. Both contain formal speeches, that is, monologues, about the nature of love. Both are characterized by a positive, affirmative tone, raising substantial philosophical issues and defending positions on them: in both, Socrates affirms certain claims about the nature of love, and in the *Phaedrus* he defends a number of claims about the requirements for making good speeches. The two dialogues are also similar in their complex richness of dramatic detail: as with other middle-period dialogues, the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* construct elaborate settings and depict their characters' engaging in complicated activities. The literary character of both dialogues is also striking: the *Symposium* could easily be presented as a drama, and the *Phaedrus* is full of myths and elaborately developed metaphors. These common characteristics of extended speeches about love, positively defended philosophical doctrines, and dramatic and literary richness must each be given careful consideration in deciding how to interpret these two dialogues.

The two dialogues also differ in significant ways. The *Symposium* reports a series of speeches in praise of love given at a dinner party. The speeches run the gamut from ribald comedy to sweeping scientific theory to lofty philosophical speculation, and the dialogue contains a great deal of detail about the characters who give the speeches and their interactions at the party. The *Phaedrus*, on the other hand, records a conversation between Socrates and a younger man named Phaedrus. (This same character offers the first speech about love in the *Symposium*.) After meeting and walking to a quiet place outside of town, they read a speech by Lysias, a famous orator of the time, that is an effort to seduce a young boy. Socrates offers two quite different, alternative speeches on the same theme, and he and Phaedrus then discuss what is required for making a good speech. Again, there is much detail about the interactions of the characters and the setting. Moreover, the *Phaedrus* gives much attention to the making and interpreting of myths.

SOME GENERAL ISSUES INVOLVED IN BOTH DIALOGUES

Before looking at each of these dialogues individually, a number of general questions related to the understanding of both must be considered. One major point which beginning students sometimes overlook is that these dialogues, like all the others by Plato, are works of fiction. The settings and the characters do have some historical basis—indeed, the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* are the source of much of our modern knowledge of the social attitudes and practices of Athenian aristocrats. Nevertheless, there is no reason to assume that these texts are reports of actual events and conversations or that any of the speeches in them were composed by anyone other than Plato (this applies even to the speech in the *Phaedrus* attributed to Lysias). Thus, the reader must keep in mind that the work is entirely by one hand and ask why the author includes what is there and why it is presented as it is. What is Plato trying to accomplish in these texts, and why does he include the various characters, settings, actions, speeches, and conversations in the way he does? The reader must avoid assuming that the contents of the dialogues are dictated by historical fact.

Another general issue that must be addressed is the status of Socrates as an exemplar of the philosopher. Until fairly recently, it was nearly universally assumed that the figure of Socrates was always presented by Plato as the ideal form of a philosopher, and of a human being. Thus, it was assumed that Socrates is not only the spokesman for Plato in the discussions in the dialogues, but that his depicted character and behavior is unqualifiedly approved by Plato. However, some contemporary scholars have challenged this assumption.

In the past, the general view has been that the *Symposium* presents Plato's own view of love in the speech of Socrates and is in part intended to exonerate Socrates from certain accusations connected with his association with the notorious Alcibiades, and that the second speech by Socrates in the *Phaedrus*, along with Socrates' conclusions in the conversation about how to make good speeches, also represent Plato's own views. However, Martha Nussbaum has argued that the *Symposium* is intended largely to criticize and reject some aspects of Socrates' behavior and the Socratic philosophy as overly attached to abstract universal principles at the expense of concern for concrete individuality. In her view the understanding of love presented by Socrates and depicted in the personal relationships of Socrates as described in this dialogue are not being affirmed by Plato, but criticized for their shortcomings.³ Thus, the reader must not simply assume that the figure and words of Socrates in the dialogues have Plato's unqualified endorsement. (Nussbaum argues that the Socrates of the *Phaedrus*, on the contrary, does present Plato's own views.⁴ She assumes there is a significant difference between the views articulated by Socrates in the two dialogues, of course.)

A further general issue that can be very distracting to contemporary, first-time readers is the treatment of homosexuality in these dialogues. In the various views that are expressed about the nature and significance of love in both dialogues, the sexual expression of love that is considered is almost always homosexual in form. Moreover, homosexual relationships are generally approved of by the speakers in the dialogues, although it is recognized that these relationships are sometimes wrong. Apparently, the usual pattern is for an older man to establish an intimate relationship with a young man who becomes his protégé, with the initiative normally coming from the older man. Thus, the benefits derived from the relationship are quite different for the two participants: educational and social advantages for the youth, and sexual pleasure and companionship for the older man.⁵ This sort of relationship is presented in the dialogues as a normal part of everyday life in ancient Athens, at least among the aristocrats.⁶

It is particularly important to remember these assumptions about what is normal and appropriate in sexual relationships when trying to understand the responses Alcibiades attributes to Socrates when he describes his efforts to seduce Socrates in the *Symposium*. In this context, although such relationships can take an improper form, there is nothing improper, abnormal, or immoral about a homosexual relationship as such. In the *Phaedrus* Socrates does express some reservations about the sexual dimension of these relationships, but his remarks are more cautionary than condemnatory and must be interpreted within the context of the dialogue.

Since speeches are an important motif in both of these dialogues, an additional general issue that is important for understanding these two dialogues has to do with the Greek term for "speech," which is λόγος, *logos*.⁷ The *Symposium* contains a number of speeches, and the *Phaedrus* contains three speeches and a conversation about the requirements for making a good speech. The Greek word for "speech" is *logos*, but the term *logos* cannot be translated by a single English word. I have variously used "speech," "argument," "statement," "account," "discussion," and also "reason" (in the sense of the capacity to think). The term obviously has to do with the use of language and with the activity of thinking, but just how this is being understood is not obvious from the English translations.

In its primary sense, the Greek term denotes an activity, that of using language, rather than a set of words existing as an object, such as a written speech or even language itself as an abstract entity. Moreover, as an active verb, speaking takes a direct object, that is, one does not speak *about* the world, one speaks the world. This grammatical structure suggests that speech is understood as doing something to the object one is, as we would say, speaking about. Speaking has a direct effect on its object. A useful way of understanding this is to think of speech as primarily a means of showing or displaying an object, of letting the nature of the object disclose itself, rather than of

reporting one's thoughts or feelings about the object. From this point of view, talking about things can be a way of discovering something about the nature of things. That is, language can reveal more to the speaker and the listener than either brings to it.⁸ This suggests an explanation for Socrates' concern for and involvement with *logos*, especially in its living form as conversation or dialogue (διάλογος, *dialogos*).⁹

The term *logos* is also sometimes translated as "reason."¹⁰ In this sense reason is understood as the capacity to grasp the nature of something in a structured and intelligible way, just as one does in speaking (about) something. This suggests that whatever can be grasped by reason can be expressed in speech, for reason, as Plato says in *Sophist* 264a, is silent speaking. Thus, the objects of reason cannot be ineffable. This general issue regarding the nature of *logos* is particularly important for the interpretation of the *Phaedrus*. It is also an important issue in Plato's *Cratylus* and *Sophist*.

A final general issue that the reader should have in mind throughout these two dialogues concerns the term "love." The Greek term I translate as "love," following the usual practice, is ἔρως, *erōs*.¹¹ There can be no doubt that the term is primarily used of sexual desire, although it is used for other sorts of desire, perhaps metaphorically,¹² and in the speeches in both dialogues the sense of the term is extended far beyond sexual desire. This raises the question of how far this elevation of *erōs* can be taken as a serious suggestion, rather than a sophisticated farce. Some of the things said by some speakers in the *Symposium*, especially Socrates, might have been seen as ludicrous by an Athenian audience and could indicate an intentional parody by Plato. The greater ambiguity of the English word "love" may be misleading in this regard. There are some fantastical claims about the nature of love in Socrates' second speech in the *Phaedrus* that are surely tongue-in-cheek, though this is not incompatible with a serious intent, of course.

On the other hand, it is not clear what other Greek term the speakers could have used to engage in a serious discussion of the "elevated" sorts of attitudes and principles they here call a form of *erōs*. There are two other Greek terms that are often translated as "love" (though not in my translations of these two dialogues) namely, ἀγάπη, *agapē*, and φιλία, *philia*. The term *agapē*, which is used in the Koine Greek of the *New Testament* to refer to the peculiar love of God, in Plato's time referred to affectionate, sometimes passionate desire and does not play an important part in the discussions in these dialogues. The verbal form of this term, which I translate differently in different contexts, occurs three times in the *Symposium*: at 180b (where I translate it as "cherishes"), at 181c ("cherishing"), and at 210d ("lusting after"). The verbal form occurs five times in the *Phaedrus*: at 233e ("adore") and at 241d, 247d, 253a, and 257e ("cherish"). An adjectival form occurs at *Phaedrus* 230c ("delightful").

The term *philia* and related terms occur frequently in these dialogues, especially in the *Phaedrus*, but *philia* is closer to what we call "friendship." It

is used of the relationship of mutuality and sharing between friends and between the members of a family and would not ordinarily imply sexual desire. This term and its variants, including compounds such as φιλοσοφία, *philosophia* (which, when it is not read as “philosophy,” is rendered by most translators as “love of wisdom”) are not translated using the term “love” in these translations, so as to avoid confusion for the reader.

The nature of love (*erōs*) is a major focus in both dialogues, and it is important for the Greekless reader to be able to see just how the term is used. Hence, every occurrence of the term *erōs* and its variants, but no other Greek word, is translated with the word ‘love’ and variants (except for five times as “erotic” in the *Phaedrus*).

In the *Phaedrus*, in addition to love (*erōs*), friendship (*philia*) is a major theme that is both discussed by the characters and illustrated in their interactions. Accordingly, I have consistently used the terms ‘friend,’ ‘friendship,’ and variations for every occurrence of terms related to *philia*—including compounds such as *philosophia* (“friendship with wisdom”).¹³ Again, the purpose is to enable the Greekless reader to follow carefully the explication of a term when it is an important focus of the dialogue.

Except for these two terms, I have not tried to maintain a rigid consistency in the translation, that is, using the same English word for the same Greek word on every occasion. This would make for an awkward and misleading translation—Greek terms do not match up perfectly with English ones. Those who are interested in careful study of Plato’s use of Greek terms must learn to use the Greek text.

I should also mention that Greek does not use the term for a male human being (*άνήρ*, *anēr*) to refer to human beings in general. In the latter case, the term *άνθρωπος*, *anthrōpos*, is used. Hence, in these translations the terms ‘man’ and ‘men’ and the masculine pronouns are not being used in a supposedly gender-neutral sense. The focus in both dialogues is clearly on males and male relationships, unless it is explicitly indicated otherwise.

THE PROBLEM OF INTERPRETATIVE METHODOLOGY

In addition to the above general issues related to understanding these dialogues, some consideration must be given to the general question of how to interpret Plato’s dialogues. This involves the question of what kind of texts they are and especially of how to deal with their literary and dramatic aspects. This issue of interpretive methodology in reading Plato has become a matter of considerable controversy in recent years.¹⁴

While it is virtually impossible to completely ignore the literary and dramatic qualities of Plato’s dialogues when assessing their philosophical content, most interpreters do focus on the argumentation, especially that given by Socrates, and assume that this represents what Plato is affirming in the dia-

logue. Thus, most readers assume that the views Socrates presents in his report of his discussions with Diotima in the *Symposium* and in his second speech and the discussion of the art of making speeches in the *Phaedrus* are the views Plato is defending as true.

In recent years a number of scholars have objected that this sort of approach does not give adequate attention to the significance of the literary and dramatic aspects of the dialogues. It seems implausible to treat elements that Plato uses so much effort to introduce into the texts, especially in dialogues like the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, as having no significant role in shaping the philosophical content of the dialogues. However, just what the significance of the literary and dramatic aspects is for the philosophical content of the dialogues is a subject about which there is an enormous diversity of opinion.¹⁵

Of course, the common approach to the dialogues that focuses on the argumentation does not completely neglect literary and dramatic elements in the texts. It would be nearly impossible to ignore such things as the mythical character of the language in which Diotima's views are cast, or the role of irony in some of Socrates' claims, or the fact that the presence of Alcibiades in the *Symposium* as a young man whom Socrates could be accused of having corrupted is relevant to an assessment of Plato's intention in the dialogue.¹⁶ Insofar as the demand is simply to pay attention to the entire text, then, this is not particularly controversial, although it might require being a little more careful about comparing statements about a single theme drawn from different dialogues. The issue is whether these literary and dramatic elements are merely supplementary to the content of the argumentation, or play a more decisive role, providing the key for interpreting the argumentation, perhaps, or a basis for claiming that the outcome of the argumentation does not really represent Plato's, or Socrates', own views. Here there is a very wide spectrum of opinion, from those who see the literary and dramatic aspects as enriching and supplementing, but not disrupting the straightforward analysis of the argumentation, to those who would claim that the literary and dramatic elements are the core of the dialogues and the argumentation is to be entirely subordinated, if not ignored, in understanding the message of the texts.

A very extreme position on this spectrum is taken by James Arieti, who argues that the dialogues should not be seen as philosophical texts at all, but as dramas in a straightforward sense. The key to understanding the dialogues in his eyes is the dramatic depiction of characters and their actions; the argumentation must be seen as subservient to dramatic necessities and not as serious efforts by Plato to develop or explore philosophical analyses and positions.¹⁷

Very few Plato scholars are likely to be willing to give such an extreme view any credence, but Arieti's approach does at least involve a fresh reading and can stimulate useful reflection. His interpretation of the *Symposium* is a striking example of the results of this approach. He argues that the dialogue is

not a serious philosophical investigation of the nature of love. Rather it is a demonstration of the craft of theologizing. In the various speeches in the dialogue, love is personified as a divine being, and each of the speakers offers an interpretation of the nature of the god. What the drama shows us, Arieti claims, is how the depicted nature of the god in each case bears a striking resemblance to the character of the speaker who is characterizing him. In other words, the *Symposium* is a dramatic depiction of the fact that when human beings discuss the gods, they tend to make the gods in their own images. Arieti concludes that there is no reason to assume that Plato would have affirmed any of these depictions of love as "true."¹⁸

A slightly less radical approach, which also focuses on the literary and dramatic aspects as crucial rather than merely supplemental in interpreting the dialogues, argues that this perspective reveals that the function of the dialogues is not to present philosophical doctrines, but to stimulate readers to engage in their own analysis and reflection on philosophical issues. This way of reading the dialogues assumes that Plato's concern is more to assist his readers in learning how to think than to tell them what to think. In keeping with this pedagogical purpose, some scholars argue, Plato does not reveal, at least straightforwardly, his own views in the dialogues. Rather he presents analyses and conclusions that are all more or less problematical on purpose, hoping that readers will be caught up in the discussion and not have their own rational activity cut off by being told "the truth."¹⁹ Another approach somewhat similar to this one argues that Plato never reveals his own views straightforwardly on the surface of the argumentation in the dialogues, but only hints at them in subtle ways. Dramatic elements are often seen as such hints.²⁰

One could argue that neither Arieti's emphasis on the reading of the dialogues as drama nor the claim that Plato has a major interest in stimulating his readers to engage in philosophical enquiry is incompatible with Plato's having included argumentation in the dialogues that represents his best and most serious philosophical efforts.²¹ Thus, most contemporary readers of Plato who emphasize the importance of the literary and dramatic aspects of the dialogues do not see this as involving a general denigration of the argumentation. On the contrary, they use the dramatic and literary elements to enrich and guide the analysis of the arguments.

Martha Nussbaum is a well-known exponent of this approach, in which the argumentation is interpreted in light of the dramatic and literary elements of the text. She argues, for example, that traditional analyses of the *Symposium* have been seriously flawed by a failure to realize that the dramatic and literary structure of the dialogue makes the speech of Alcibiades the key to interpreting the dialogue's message. As a result of neglecting this speech, she argues, scholars have failed to see that the *Symposium* involves a serious criticism by Plato of the Socratic way of life and love in the form of a condemnation of Socrates' otherworldliness.²²

In such readings as this, however, it is clearly the case that the argumentation in the dialogues is being taken seriously, even when it is claimed that the dramatic and literary aspects help the reader to see that some of the argumentation is not intended to be taken in the most straightforward way as representing views Plato intends to support. On balance, therefore, attention to the dramatic and literary elements in the dialogues does not need to lead away from a concern for the argumentation in the dialogues, although it may lead to a more critical evaluation of it. Given the preponderance of the argumentation in the dialogues, it seems implausible to say that it is not the central element in the texts, although it also seems implausible to ignore the possible significance of the dramatic and literary aspects, especially of such dialogues as the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*.

These two dialogues are excellent ones for considering this issue of interpretative methodology. Both are exceptionally rich in dramatic and literary characteristics, and the issue of how to interpret a text, especially texts like Plato's dialogues, seems to be raised explicitly in the *Phaedrus*. I consider the implications of the discussion of this issue in the *Phaedrus* in my commentary on that dialogue, and throughout both commentaries I try to take note of ways in which one might see dramatic and literary aspects of the texts as having significance for the interpretation of their philosophical content.

The numbers and letters in the margins of the translations of the dialogues refer to sections of the pages of the Stephanus edition of the Greek text and represent the standard way of locating specific passages in Plato's dialogues. Their placement is only approximate, but is sufficiently accurate to facilitate cross-reference to the Greek texts, or to other translations, and to allow the location of passages that are referred to in secondary discussions.

2

The Symposium

INTRODUCTION

The *Symposium*, one of Plato's middle-period dialogues, is generally considered to have been composed around 385–380 B.C.E.¹ and to be one of Plato's most impressive achievements. The dialogue is constructed as a report of several speeches about love that were presented at a dinner party given by the playwright Agathon on the occasion of his winning first prize in a tragedy contest in Athens. (The actual contest occurred in 416 B.C.E.) This report is presented as being given by a man named Apollodorus to an unnamed companion some time after the event.

A number of the characters in the *Symposium* are based on well-known people. It is important for the reader to be aware of the background that would have been clear to readers in Plato's day. Besides Socrates himself, the iconoclastic, comic playwright Aristophanes is the figure we are most familiar with, through his still existing plays.² In Plato's day, however, no one would have been more familiar than the traitor/hero Alcibiades, whose notorious career included a youthful period during which he spent some time in the company of Socrates. At the time of Agathon's party in the dialogue, Alcibiades would have been in his early thirties.

Alcibiades was a man of enormous wealth, talent, and charm. In 415, the year after Agathon's party, he was chosen to lead the ill-fated expedition to Sicily whose disastrous loss ultimately resulted in the defeat of Athens by Sparta in the Peloponnesian War. However, the night before the expedition left, many Herms, that is, statues displaying representations of the face and genitals of the god Hermes that were placed near the doors of homes as expressions of devotion and hope for protection, were destroyed. The populace was outraged and decided that the crime was the work of Alcibiades. When Alcibiades received word that he was to return to Athens in order to be executed for this crime, he defected to Sparta instead and was of great assistance to them in their defeat of Athens. Nevertheless, some years later Alcibi-

ades was again welcomed back into Athens as a hero, although he was not popular with some factions and was finally assassinated.

The tragedian Agathon is also known from extant records, although none of his plays have survived. Shortly after the triumph that occasions the party in the dialogue, he left Athens in order to join the court of the notorious tyrant Archelaus. Eryximachus was a famous physician of the time; both he and Phaedrus were accused of complicity in the destruction of the Herms that was blamed on Alcibiades. The other characters lack known historical bases, although there is a Pausanias of similar character in Xenophon's *Symposium*. We have no clear evidence of the existence of anyone who could be the basis of the characters Diotima, Aristodemus, and Apollodorus, although an Apollodorus appears in the *Apology* as one of Socrates' friends who offers to pay his proposed fine and in the *Phaedo* as one of those friends present at Socrates' final conversation.

The *Symposium* is not simply a series of speeches, although the bulk of the text does consist of seven monologues, by Phaedrus (178a–180c), Pausanias (180c–185c), Eryximachus (185e–188e), Aristophanes (189a–193d), Agathon (194e–197e), Socrates (201d–212c), and Alcibiades (215a–222b). Surrounding and connecting these speeches are incidents, interchanges, and editorial comments by Apollodorus that are an important part of the dialogue.

The overarching issue in the *Symposium* is, of course, the nature of love, that is, of *erōs*. Plato explores this issue through a series of speeches, but the speakers do not agree with each other and take quite different perspectives on the issue. What does Plato intend to affirm about the nature of *erōs*, and about the human condition in general, through all this? Every point raised in my commentary on the dialogue is related to that question, but a brief summation of the problem here may be useful.

While there are significant differences among the first five speakers, through Agathon, a number of points are made that seem to provide the groundwork for the final two speakers, Socrates and Alcibiades, so the reader should not neglect these early speeches. That *erōs* is initially understood to be sexual desire is obvious, and that such desire can have varied consequences and take varied forms, some of which are better than others, is emphasized. Moreover, the possibility is also raised that *erōs* has much greater significance than mere sexual desire, so that sexual desire is only a limited manifestation of something more profound: Eryximachus connects *erōs* with the most fundamental workings of the cosmos, and Aristophanes connects it with the most basic needs of human beings and sees its fulfillment as the key to human happiness. This movement toward interpreting *erōs* as the key to human being in general, and the cosmos, reaches its culmination in the views of Diotima that Socrates reports. Here *erōs* is seen as the means of actualizing the highest potentialities of human being through achieving an understanding of the ultimate principle of beauty, which is the ultimate object of *erōs*. Here is found

the life that human beings are truly fit for. But what does Plato think that life is like?

There is some divergence of opinion among interpreters on this matter. Virtually everyone sees Diotima's views as the key, but not everyone understands her vision in the same way. Some see her as pointing toward some sort of mystical encounter with a transcendent reality of unspeakable beauty, while others note that she seems to suggest that *erōs* at its highest level leads to a life of producing beautiful things, especially philosophical conversations. These two views may not be incompatible. To some extent, the issue turns on how one takes Alcibiades' speech in praise of Socrates. If Plato intends it to give us a concrete example of the life Diotima is pointing toward, this provides a way of getting a grasp on what he is affirming in the dialogue. Yet Alcibiades' depiction of Socrates is somewhat ambiguous. He shows Socrates to be a man of courage, conviction, judgment, tenacity, and above all, devotion to philosophical conversation and thought, a man whose wisdom is so inspiring he should be obeyed in all things, but at the same time Alcibiades also seems to think he is arrogant and difficult, if not cold and inhuman.

So, what is Plato saying human life at its best is like? Dealing with this issue requires paying careful attention to just how Plato is depicting the life of love at its highest level, in the views attributed to Diotima, as well as in Alcibiades' stories. It also requires paying careful attention to the issues that are raised in the earlier speeches, and to the context in which the speeches are presented, that is, to the dramatic and literary aspects of the dialogue.

The grammatical structure of the dialogue is very complex. It is a conversation that reports a conversation that sometimes itself includes reports of other conversations. In order to avoid distractingly complicated patterns of quotation marks, I have greatly abbreviated their use. However, the reader can easily determine from the context what level of quotation is actually involved in individual passages. After the opening dialogue between Apollodorus and his unnamed companion, the entire text is narrated by Apollodorus.

THE DIALOGUE

APOLLODORUS: I believe I'm not unprepared for what you're asking to hear. 172a
Just the other day I was going up to town from my home in Phalerum,³ when
someone I know, catching sight of me from some distance behind, shouted:

"Hey, Phalerian!" he called (he was making a joke⁴ at the same time),
"you, Apollodorus, will you wait?"

So, I stopped and waited.

"Actually, Apollodorus," he said, "I was just looking for you as I wanted 172b
to ask about the party at Agathon's when Socrates, Alcibiades, and the others
were present for dinner. What were their speeches about love? Someone else
told me what he had heard from Phoenix, the son of Philip,⁵ and he claimed
that you're also familiar with them. However, his report wasn't very clear, so
would you go over them for me? A report of the words of your companion
would be quite appropriate coming from you. But first tell me," he went on,
"whether or not you yourself were present at the party."

"The account you received wasn't at all clear," I said, "if you believe that 172c
party you're asking about was recent enough for me to have been present."

"I did indeed," he said.

"How could you, Glaucon?"⁶ I replied. "Don't you know that Agathon 173a
hasn't lived here for many years, while I've been spending time with Socrates
for less than three years, making it my purpose to know what he says or does
every day? Prior to that, I was charging around haphazardly, just as you are
now, believing I was achieving something, although I was more useless than
anyone, and thinking that it would be better to do anything rather than engage
in philosophy."

"Quit teasing," he said, "and tell me when that gathering occurred."

"While we were still youngsters," I replied, "when Agathon won the
prize with his first tragedy.⁷ It was on the day after he and his company cele-
brated his victory feast."

"Well, then," he said, "it seems it was a long time ago. But who told you
about it? Socrates himself?"

"No, by Zeus," I responded, "it was the same person who told Phoenix, 173b
an Aristodemus from Cydathenaeum, a small fellow who goes barefoot all the
time, and is a lover of Socrates (and one of the most devoted at that time, it
seemed to me). He was present at the party. However, I did also ask Socrates
about some of the things I heard from Aristodemus, and he agrees with what
Aristodemus told me."

"Then, why don't you go through it for me?" he said. "After all, the road
we're taking into town is a good one for conversation."

So, we went over the speeches as we strolled along, and as a result, as I 173c
said at the beginning, I'm not unprepared. If I must go through them again with
you, so be it. For myself, at least, aside from the question of whether it's benefi-

cial, I find any discussion of philosophy extraordinarily enjoyable, whether I am engaging in it myself or only listening to that of others. When I hear people talk about other things, however, especially you rich men who're involved in business, I become bored and feel sorry for you and your companions because you think you're achieving something when you're really accomplishing nothing. On your side, you probably believe that I'm unhappy, and I suppose your belief is true. Yet I don't think that about you, I know it for sure! 173d

COMPANION: You're always the same, Apollodorus; you always criticize everyone, including yourself. You seem to believe that everyone is miserable, beginning with yourself—except Socrates. Where you got this nickname “the gentle one,” I don't know, because in your conversation you're always so angry at yourself and everyone else—everybody but Socrates, of course.

APOLLODORUS: Ah, best of friends, is it so clear that I'm crazy and off target in thinking about myself and you in this way? 173e

COMPANION: There's no merit in our arguing about this just now, Apollodorus. Don't do anything but what I just asked: Recite the speeches for me.

APOLLODORUS: Well, they went like this—but I'd better try to tell it to you from the beginning, as Aristodemus told it to me. 174a

He said he met Socrates, who was coming from the baths and wearing sandals, which he rarely did, and he asked Socrates where he was going looking so beautiful.

“To dinner at Agathon's,” he replied. “I stayed away from the victory feasts yesterday, because I was concerned about the crowd, but I agreed to be there today. I'm dressed up this way so that beauty may approach beauty. But you,” he said, “how do you feel about going to this dinner without an invitation?” 174b

“Well,” Aristodemus said that he replied, “I'll do whatever you say.”

“Then come along,” Socrates said, “so that we can pervert the proverb by changing it to say: ‘Good men go to the feasts of the good without an invitation.’⁸ Homer not only perverts this proverb, he comes close to treating it outrageously. He makes Agamemnon a man who is extremely good at warfare, and Menelaus a ‘weak spearman.’⁹ Then, when Agamemnon is celebrating the performance of a sacrifice, he has Menelaus attend the feast without an invitation, an inferior man going to the feast of the better.”¹⁰ 174c

Aristodemus said that when he heard this he responded, “I'm probably not what you say I am, Socrates. Rather, as Homer has it, it's a useless person, me, going uninvited to the feast of a wise and skillful man. So, since it's you who's taking me, you should construct some excuse, because I won't admit that I come uninvited. I'll say it's at your command.” 174d

“Then, ‘while two go along, one before the other,’”¹¹ he said, “we can plan what we'll say. But let's be on our way!”

Aristodemus said that after conversing in that way they set off. Socrates then became absorbed in his thoughts and fell behind as they travelled along the road, but when Aristodemus waited for him, Socrates ordered him to go on ahead. When Aristodemus arrived at Agathon's house, he found the door open. He said he felt it was somewhat awkward, for a slave from inside immediately came out to meet him and led him to where the others were reclining,¹² and he found them getting ready to dine. However, Agathon called out, as soon as he saw him, "Aristodemus! You've come at a good time! You must dine with us. If you've come for some other purpose, postpone it until later. I looked for you yesterday so I could invite you, but I didn't see you anywhere. But why haven't you brought Socrates with you?" 174e

"When I turned around," Aristodemus continued, "I saw that Socrates was nowhere behind me. So, I said that I actually had come with Socrates, because he had invited me to the dinner."

"You're doing the right thing," Agathon responded, "but where is he?"

"He was coming along behind me just now, but I wonder myself where he could be." 175a

According to Aristodemus, Agathon told a slave, "Why don't you go search for Socrates and bring him in? And Aristodemus, you recline here beside Eryximachus."

Aristodemus said that a slave brought him water to wash with so that he could recline on the couch and that another of the slaves came and reported: "Socrates is here. He has stopped on the porch next door and is just standing there. When I asked him, he didn't want to come in."

"That's odd," Agathon said, "continue inviting him and don't take no for an answer."

Aristodemus reported that he responded, "No, no! Leave him alone! It's something he often does. He can become transfixed anywhere he happens to be standing. I expect he'll come soon. Don't disturb him; leave him alone." 175b

He said that Agathon replied, "If that's your opinion, that's what must be done. You slaves, serve the others. You always serve up whatever you wish when no one is supervising you (which I never do); so now, pretend that you have invited these other people and me to dinner. Serve us in a manner that will make us praise you." 175c

Aristodemus said that after this they ate, though Socrates had not yet come in. Agathon kept wanting to send after Socrates, but Aristodemus wouldn't let him. And as usual, Socrates came along after not too long a time—they were hardly halfway through the meal.

Aristodemus reported that Agathon, who was reclining alone on the last couch,¹³ then called out, "Socrates, recline here beside me so that by touching you I may gain the benefit of the wisdom that came to you on the porch. You obviously found it and are holding on to it, for otherwise you wouldn't have come in." 175d

Socrates sat down and replied, "I'd be happy, Agathon, if wisdom were the kind of thing that would flow from the one of us with more of it to the one with less when we touch each other, the way water flows through a piece of yarn from the fuller cup to the emptier. If it were that way, I'd place a very high value on reclining beside you. I suspect I'd be filled with a lot of fine wisdom from you. My own is surely as worthless and ambiguous as a dream, but yours is bright and has great promise. Despite your being so young, it shone forth brilliantly when it was manifested the other day before more than thirty thousand Greeks!" 175e

"You're being outrageous,¹⁴ Socrates," Agathon responded. "You and I can argue these claims about wisdom a little later, when we'll use Dionysus¹⁵ as the judge. But for now, turn to your dinner first."

Aristodemus said that after this Socrates lay back and ate his dinner with the others. When they had eaten, they poured their libations, sang to the god, did the other customary things, and then turned to the drinking. At that point, he reported, Pausanias spoke up along these lines: 176a

"Well now, gentlemen," Pausanias said, "what will be the most moderate way for us to drink? I can tell you that I myself am in a quite dreadful condition from yesterday's drinking, and I need some relief. I suspect most of you do, too. You were present yesterday. So, let's look for a way to drink as moderately as possible." 176b

Then Aristophanes responded, "What you say is true, Pausanias. We must, at any rate, find a way of drinking that will be easier on us. I got soused yesterday myself!"

After hearing them, according to Aristodemus, Eryximachus, the son of Acumenus declared: "What you both are saying is true, yet I need to hear something from you, Agathon. Are you up to drinking?"

"Not at all," Agathon replied, "I don't have the strength for it myself."

"Then, it seems it would be a bit of luck from Hermes,"¹⁶ Eryximachus continued, "for me, Aristophanes, Phaedrus, and the others, if you hardest drinkers would stop now, since we always fall short by comparison. Socrates I exempt from the account; he'll be satisfied either way, and it will be alright with him whatever we do. So, since it seems to me that no one here has the stomach for drinking much wine, I probably will provoke less displeasure when I tell you the truth about the nature of intoxication. I believe it has become clear from medical practice that intoxication is a harmful thing for human beings. I myself would not voluntarily drink too deeply, nor would I advise anyone to do so, especially when they still have a hangover from the previous day." 176d

Aristodemus said that Phaedrus the Myrrhinousian then announced: "I customarily obey you myself, Eryximachus, especially when you speak about medical matters, and this time the others would also be well advised to do so."

When they heard this, everyone agreed not to make the present gathering a drinking bout, but to drink only as they pleased. 176e

“Then, now that it’s been decided,” Eryximachus continued, “that drinking is to be as each desires and not compulsory, the next thing I propose is that we dismiss the flute-girl who just came in. Let her play for herself, or if she prefers, for the women inside. We can entertain each other today with speeches, and if you are willing, I’d also like to offer you a proposal about the topic for the speeches.”

They all said that they were willing and encouraged him to make his proposal. So, Eryximachus continued, “The beginning of my statement is from the *Melanippe* of Euripides,¹⁷ for ‘the story is not mine,’ but Phaedrus’s, that I intend to tell. Phaedrus often complains to me, ‘Eryximachus,’ he says, ‘isn’t it terrible that hymns in honor of each of the other gods have been written by the poets, but none of the many poets that have existed has ever composed a single poem or hymn of praise for Love,¹⁸ who is such a great and ancient god? Moreover, if you would examine the venerable wisemen who write essays praising Heracles and others, as the excellent Prodicus¹⁹ does, it is hardly surprising, of course, but I’ve actually encountered a certain book by a wise man in which there was some astonishing praise of the benefits of salt, and you can find many other such things that have been the subjects of tributes.²⁰ So, they produce compositions about such things with great enthusiasm, but not a single person to this day has ever ventured to produce a hymn of Love in a fitting manner. On the contrary, this great god has been ignored!’ Now, it seems to me that what Phaedrus says is right, so I am eager to gratify²¹ him and to offer a contribution. Moreover, it seems to me to be appropriate for those of us here to honor the god on this occasion. So, if it meets with your approval, passing the time with speeches should be enough for us, and I think each of us ought to make as beautiful a speech in praise of Love as he possibly can, going from left to right. Phaedrus can lead off, since he is reclining on the first couch and, moreover, is the father of the proposal.”

“No one will vote against you, Eryximachus,” Socrates responded. “I, who say I understand nothing other than the activities of love, will surely not protest, nor will Agathon and Pausanias,²² nor will Aristophanes, who spends all his time with Dionysus and Aphrodite,²³ nor will any of the others I see here. Of course, it’s not fair for those of us who’re reclining in the last positions, but if those who go earlier speak in a beautiful and satisfactory manner, we’ll be content. Good luck to Phaedrus! Let him begin his tribute to Love.”

All the others agreed with this and with what Socrates proposed. Everyone of them made a speech on the topic, but Aristodemus didn’t remember everything and I don’t remember everything he told me. But I’ll tell you what seemed to me most worth remembering from each one’s speech.

First of all, he reported that Phaedrus began, as I mentioned, saying something to the effect that Love is a great god, who amazes both human beings and gods for many reasons, not least because of his origins.

“He is honored as among the oldest of the gods,” Phaedrus said, “and there

is definite proof of this. Of the parents of Love, no one knows or speaks, either in poetry or in prose. On the contrary, Hesiod says that there was at first Chaos 178b

and then,

Full-bosomed Earth, the eternal steadfast abode of all,
And Love.²⁴

Moreover, Hesiod and Acusilaus²⁵ both agree that these two, Earth and Love, came into being after Chaos, and Parmenides²⁶ says of Love's origins:

First among all the gods, Love was created.

Thus, it is agreed in many places that Love is among the oldest of the gods, and, as one of the oldest, he is the cause of our greatest blessings. For I can't say that there is a greater blessing right from boyhood than a good lover or a greater blessing for a lover than a darling. What people who intend to lead their lives in a noble and beautiful manner need is not provided by family, public honors, wealth, or anything else, so well as by Love. 178c
178d

"So, what do I mean by this? I refer to being ashamed in the face of shameful things and inspired with a respect for honor in the face of noble things, for without these neither a city nor an individual can accomplish great and beautiful deeds. Now, I claim that if a man who loves someone is discovered doing something shameful or failing through cowardice to defend himself against some shame, he would not be as distressed at being seen in such circumstances by anyone, not his father, his companions, nor anyone else, as he would be at being seen by his darling. We see this same response on the part of the one who is loved: He likewise is thoroughly ashamed before his lovers should he be observed engaging in something shameful. Thus, if someone could come up with a technique by which a city or an army composed of lovers and their darlings could be created, there could be no better way of organizing their city, since they would abstain from everything shameful and would be jealous of their honor in front of each other. If such men fought beside one another, although few in number, they would succeed against practically the whole of humanity. A man who is in love would of course find it less tolerable to be seen abandoning his position or casting aside his weapons by his darling than by anyone else and would choose to die many times over before letting that happen. As for abandoning one's darling or not coming to his aid when he is in danger, no one is so base that Love could not so inspire him with virtue that he would act like the person who is by nature the most courageous. If I may speak candidly, when Homer says that a god 'breathes strength' into certain heroes,²⁷ that, coming from Love himself, is what Love does to lovers. 178e
179a
179b

"Moreover, only lovers are willing to die for someone else, and this is so not only with men, but also with women. Among Greeks, Alcestis, the daughter of Pelius, furnishes adequate evidence of this claim. Although her husband

had a father and a mother, she was the only one who was willing to die in his place. Because of her love, she outdid them in her filial affection and made them seem like strangers to their son, as if they were relatives in name only. When she had done this deed, her actions seemed beautiful and noble, not only to human beings, but also to the gods, so that, although many people have performed numerous beautiful and noble deeds, the gods granted her the privilege given to very few: They sent her soul back up from Hades. They sent it back because they admired her action. So even the gods give great honor to the zeal and virtue connected with Love. However, they sent Orpheus, the son of Oeagrus, away from Hades unsuccessful, after showing him the shade of the wife for whom he had come. They refused to give her up since he seemed to be soft because he played the lyre, and he lacked the courage to die for his love, as Alcestis had, and instead managed to enter Hades alive. It was because of this that they punished him by making his death come at the hands of women.²⁸ It was different with Achilles, the son of Thetis, whom the gods honored and sent to the Islands of the Blest. After learning from his mother that he would die if he killed Hector but if he did not he could return home and live out his old age, Achilles had the courage to choose to strike a blow for his lover Patroclus and not only to die for, but also to die after the one who had already died. As a result, the gods had enormous admiration for him and specially honored him, because he had done so much for his lover.²⁹ Aeschylus is talking nonsense when he claims that Achilles was the lover of Patroclus.³⁰ Achilles was not only more handsome than Patroclus, but more handsome than all the heroes, and was still beardless because he was much younger, as Homer says.³¹ Anyway, the gods do in fact give the greatest honor to this virtue that is connected with Love. However, they are more impressed and more admiring and treat one better when the beloved cherishes his lover than when the lover cherishes his darling. A lover is more godlike than a darling, for he is inspired by a god.³² This is why the gods gave greater honor to Achilles than to Alcestis, sending him to the Islands of the Blest.

“So, I say that among the gods Love is the oldest, the most honorable, and the most eminent, procuring virtue and happiness for human beings, both living and dead.”

Aristodemus said that Phaedrus gave some such speech as this and there were some others after Phaedrus whose speeches he could not remember much of. So, he skipped them and went on to Pausanias’ speech:

“This proposal doesn’t seem to me to bode well for us, Phaedrus,” Pausanias began, “the injunction simply to praise Love, that is. If Love were a single being, it would be fine, but as it is, there isn’t just one of him. And since there isn’t, it would be more correct to say first which particular Love we ought to praise. I’ll try to set this right by first explaining which Love we should praise and then offering my praise in a manner worthy of the god.”

"Now, we all know that Aphrodite³³ is never separated from Love. Hence, if there were only one of her, there would be only one Love, but since there are in fact two Aphrodites, there are necessarily two Loves also. And how could there not be two of the goddess? One is older, the motherless daughter of Uranus,³⁴ whom we call the 'heavenly' Aphrodite, and the other is younger, the child of Zeus and Dione,³⁵ whom we call the 'common' Aphrodite. It follows, of course, that the Love joined with the latter Aphrodite is rightly called common also, and the other is called heavenly. Now, one ought to praise all the gods; so I should try to say what has fallen to the lot of each of these two. 180e

"It is true of every action that doing it is in itself neither noble nor shameful. For example, nothing of what we are doing now, whether drinking, singing, or conversing, is noble and beautiful in itself. In actions, it's the manner of the doing that determines the quality. When an action is done nobly and correctly, it becomes noble and beautiful, but if not done correctly, it becomes shameful. So, loving and Love are not in every case noble and deserving of praise, but the loving that points us in a noble direction is. 181a

"The Love that accompanies the common Aphrodite is truly common and acts in an opportunistic manner. This is the one whom ordinary human beings love. In the first place, such people love women no less than boys, and they love those they love for their bodies rather than their souls. So, they love the most unintelligent people they can, because they are concerned only about achieving their goal and do not care whether it is done in a noble and beautiful manner. These people seize whatever opportunities happen to come along to engage in this activity and are indifferent as to whether it is good or the opposite. This Love comes from the younger rather than the older goddess, the one who in her origins shares in both the female and the male. 181b

"The Love that accompanies the heavenly Aphrodite, first of all, does not share in the female, but only in the male—this is love for young boys. Since this Aphrodite is older, she does not participate in outrageous behavior. Those who are inspired by this Love are oriented toward the male, cherishing what is by nature stronger and more intelligent. Anyone would recognize those who are motivated by this Love in a pure way, even in the case of loving young boys. They don't fall in love with boys until they begin to show some intelligence, which starts happening when their beards begin to grow. I believe that those who begin to love boys at that stage are ready to be together with them for their entire lives and even to live with them. Such lovers are not going to be deceivers, taking on someone when he lacks understanding because of his youth and then contemptuously abandoning him later on to run off after someone else. 181d

"Actually, there should be a rule³⁶ against loving young boys, so that a lot of effort will not be squandered on an uncertain prospect. It is unclear how young boys will turn out, that is, whether their souls and bodies will end up being bad or virtuous. Good men willingly set up this rule for themselves, but 181e

this sort of restriction needs to be imposed on those common lovers, just as we restrict them, as far as we can, from loving free-born women. These are the people who have prompted the reproach by some who go so far as to say that it is shameful to gratify one's lovers. People who observe these men say this because they see their importunity and injustice, since whatever is done in an orderly and lawful manner surely does not justly bear censure. 182a

"The rule about love in other cities is easy to understand, for it is simply defined, but the rule here and in Sparta is complex. In Elis and Boeotia, and places where people lack skill in stating things, it is simply set down as the law that it is noble to gratify one's lovers, and no one, either young or old, would say that it is shameful. The reason for this, I suggest, is so that they will not have to make a speech in their attempt to persuade the youths to do it, since they lack skill in making speeches. In Ionia, on the other hand, and in many other places where people live under barbarians, it is shameful by law. 182b

The tyrannical rulers of the barbarians lead them to consider such gratification shameful—and philosophy and exercising naked as well.³⁷ I suspect it does not suit the rulers to have strong ambitions develop in their subjects, nor powerful friendships and partnerships and all the other things Love so greatly enjoys engendering. The tyrants learned this from what happened here in Athens. When the love of Aristogeiton and the friendly, affectionate response of Harmodius became firmly established, it destroyed their ruler.³⁸ Thus, where it has been decreed that it is shameful to gratify lovers, this comes from the baseness of those who set up the rules, on the one hand from the avarice of the rulers and on the other hand from the lack of manliness on the part of the ruled. Where the law declares without qualification that it is noble, this is because of the mental laziness of those who establish the laws. 182c

"The rule that has been laid down here is far nobler, though as I mentioned earlier, not easy to understand. Note that it is said to be more noble to love openly rather than secretly, and especially when one loves the noblest and best youths, even if they are uglier than the others. Moreover, everyone encourages the lover tremendously—and not as doing something shameful. It is considered noble to succeed in this matter and shameful not to. Our custom grants to a lover who is striving for success the license to engage in surprising feats to win praise, feats which, if done by someone else seeking another end or wanting to accomplish some other purpose, would reap the greatest condemnation. If someone wanted to obtain money from someone or a public post or power of some other sort and if he intended to do so by using the means lovers do in pursuit of their darlings, begging and pleading with their requests, making vows, sleeping in their darlings' doorways, and being willing to perform services for them that no slave would perform, he would be prevented by his friends and even by his enemies from doing such things. His enemies would condemn him for fawning and for behavior unworthy of a free man, while his friends would admonish him and be ashamed of his actions. 182d

182e

183a

183b

However, for a lover to do all these things is attractive. He is allowed by custom to act without criticism, as if he were performing a splendid deed, and what is most extraordinary is that, as most people say, if he breaks a vow he has made, he alone will be forgiven by the gods, for a vow made under the influence of Aphrodite is not valid. Thus, both the gods and human beings have provided complete license to the lover, as our rule states. 183c

"For this reason, one might assume that in this city it is usually considered a splendid thing to be in love or to be the affectionate friend of lovers. However, fathers assign attendants to their sons who are loved, so that they will not be allowed to engage in conversation with the lovers. The attendant's injunctions aim at this end, and a boy's own friends and companions criticize him if they see anything of this sort happening. Moreover, older people do not oppose those who object, nor do they criticize them for not speaking the truth. So, after noting these things, one might believe that such behavior is usually considered most disgraceful here, but I suggest that the fact is that this is not a simple matter. As I said at the beginning, in itself an action is neither noble nor shameful, but it becomes noble when done in a noble manner and shameful when done shamefully. Thus, it is shameful to gratify someone in a worthless manner, but it is noble and beautiful when it is a worthy person and done in a noble manner. The man who is a common sort of lover is worthless, because he loves the body instead of the soul. Nor is he steadfast, since what he loves does not endure. As the flower of the body fades, the very thing he loved 'takes flight and is gone,'³⁹ and his many speeches and promises are put to shame. The lover of the character of a worthy youth remains steadfast throughout his life, since he is bonded to what is enduring. 183d
183e

"Our custom aims at testing well and properly whom to gratify and whom to avoid. For this reason it encourages the one to pursue and the other to flee, setting up a sort of contest and putting to the test which of the two kinds the lover and the beloved are. This is the explanation of the customary belief that, in the first place, it is shameful to be captured quickly. This is so that time can pass, since time seems a good test of most things. It also explains why it is considered shameful to be captured by means of wealth or political power, either when one knuckles under if treated badly and does not hold out, or when, being offered favors in the form of money or political status, one does not disdain them. These actions do not seem steadfast and enduring, quite apart from the fact that genuine friendship does not develop from them. 184a
184b

"Only one path is left by our rule, then, if the darling intends to gratify his lover in a noble and beautiful manner. For our custom is this: Just as it is not considered fawning and reproachful in the case of lovers who want to be subservient to their darlings and act like their slaves, so also there is one and only one other voluntary servitude that is not reproachful, and that is subjection for the sake of virtue. It is usually maintained by us that, if someone wants to 184c

serve another because he believes he will become a better person through him, either in terms of wisdom or some other part of virtue, this voluntary slavery is not shameful nor is it fawning. One must put both of these customs together, the one concerning the love of boys and the one concerning philosophy and the rest of virtue, into the same rule, if one intends for it to turn out that it be a noble thing for a darling to gratify a lover. 184d

“When a lover and his darling come together, each has a rule: The lover is justified in performing any services he can perform for the darling who gratifies him, and the beloved in turn is justified in providing whatever services he can for the one who is making him wise and good—assuming the former is able to introduce the other to prudence and other virtues, and the latter does want to acquire an education and other skills. When these two rules come together as a single principle, then and only then does it come about that a darling’s gratifying a lover is a noble and beautiful thing. Otherwise, it is not noble at all. Moreover, when one is following these rules, there is no shame in being deceived, but in other cases, it is always disgraceful, whether or not one is deceived: If someone gratifies a lover whom he takes to be wealthy for the sake of his wealth, it is no less shameful if it turns out that he was deceived and he gets no money because his lover is poor. It seems he shows himself to be the sort of person who would perform any sort of services whatsoever for anyone whatsoever for the sake of money, and that is not noble. By the same argument, if someone who gratifies someone whom he takes to be good for the sake of becoming a better person himself through the friendship of a lover is deceived, because the lover turns out to be evil and not in possession of virtue, his being deceived is nevertheless noble. This youth has demonstrated for his part that he would eagerly do anything at any time for the sake of virtue and in order to become a better person, and that is the noblest and most beautiful thing of all. Thus, to gratify someone for the sake of virtue is entirely noble. This is the Love of the heavenly goddess, and he is heavenly and of much worth, both in public and in private matters. For he compels both the lover himself and his beloved to care deeply about virtue. All other Loves are connected with the other goddess, the common one. 184e

185a

185b

185c

“Those are my remarks about Love, Phaedrus,” he concluded, “which I have just thrown together for you on the spot.”

After Pausanias paused⁴⁰ (people who are skilled in speaking taught me to use such phrases), Aristodemus said that Aristophanes was to speak next, but by chance he had a bad case of the hiccups, from overeating or something else, and couldn’t talk. However, Aristophanes did say (the physician Eryximachus was reclining on the next couch after his), “Eryximachus, it would be appropriate for you either to stop my hiccups or else to speak for me until I’m able to stop them.” 185d

Eryximachus responded, “On the contrary, I’ll do both. I’ll speak in your place, and when you’ve stopped your hiccups, you speak in mine. While I’m

speaking, if you hold your breath a long time perhaps the hiccups will be willing to stop. But if not, gargle with water, and if they're very severe, grab something you think will tickle your nose and make yourself sneeze! If you make that happen once or twice, even if they are very persistent, they'll stop." 185e

"You go ahead and speak," Aristophanes said, "and I'll try those things."

Eryximachus then spoke as follows: "Now then, it seems to me to be necessary, since Pausanias started off his speech well but did not complete it satisfactorily, it is, as I said, necessary for me to try to put a conclusion on his speech. It seems appropriate to me that he described Love as twofold. Not only does he arise in human souls in response to beautiful people and many other things as well, but he also exists in other things, in the bodies of all animals and even in the plants that grow in the ground, in a word, in everything there is. I think one sees from the perspective of my art, that is, medicine, how great and marvelous the god is and how he permeates everything, both human and divine." 186a

"I will speak initially from the medical perspective because I treat that art as preeminent. Now, physical bodies possess this twofold Love by nature, since it is agreed that a body's health and sickness are different and indeed opposing conditions, and dissimilar things desire and love dissimilar objects. Hence, the Love in the healthy body is one thing and that in the sick body is another. As Pausanias just argued, to gratify those human beings who are good is a noble and beautiful thing, but to gratify those who are immoral is shameful. So also, in the case of physical bodies, it is a noble thing to gratify what is good and healthy in each body and should be done (that is what is called good medical practice), but it is shameful to gratify what is bad and sick, and one should not do so if one intends to act in a professional manner. In sum, the medical art is a knowledge of the activities of Love in the body in terms of filling it up and emptying it out. The master physician is the person who can distinguish the noble and the shameful Loves in these cases and can exchange one for the other. The physician who knows how to replace one sort of Love with the other, how to engender it in cases where Love is not present but needs to be, and how to remove what is there in other cases, this physician would be a good practitioner. It is necessary to make things that are hostile to each other in the body be friendly and love each other. Now, these hostile factors are things that are completely opposed—cold to heat, bitter to sweet, dry to wet, all those sorts of oppositions. Our ancestor, Asclepius⁴¹ founded our profession on his ability to instill harmony and love between such opposites, as the poets say—and I agree with them." 186c

"Thus, medicine, as I say, in all its aspects is governed by this god, as are exercise, athletics, and agriculture. The same goes for music, too, as is clear to everyone from even a moment's consideration, and is probably what Heraclitus intended to say, though it's not stated very well in the words he used. Regarding the One, he said that in its opposition to itself it is brought together with itself, as in the attunement of a bow or a lyre.⁴² Now, it is quite absurd to 186d

187a

say that harmony consists in opposition, or even that it results from things being in opposition. He probably intended to say instead that harmony is created in the musical art by bringing a prior opposition of high and low notes into attunement. It is clear that harmony does not come from the opposition of the high and low notes. Harmony is concord, and concord is a kind of agreement. That agreement should consist in the opposition of things that are in opposition is impossible. Things that are in opposition and not in agreement are not in harmony. Rhythm, for example, results from bringing the fast and the slow, which are at first in opposition, into agreement. As with medicine earlier, here it is music that introduces agreement between all these opposites by engendering mutual love and harmony, and, again, music is a knowledge of the activities of Love with regard to harmony and rhythm. One can easily detect the activities of Love in this construction of harmony and rhythm; there are not two kinds of Love involved here.

“Now, when one needs to make use of rhythm and harmony in human affairs, either in composition (which people call creating songs and poems) or in the correct performance of tunes and verses that have already been composed (which what we call musical education deals with), here things are difficult and a good practitioner is needed. For the same principle reappears: One should gratify decent men, as well as those who, though they are not decent, might become more so, and one should defend the Love of these men—this is the noble Love, the heavenly Love of the Muse Urania. In the case of the common Love, that of Polymnia,⁴³ one must be cautious about whom one engages in it with, so that one may gain pleasure for oneself but never engender immorality. It is the same as in our profession: It takes great effort to deal appropriately with the desires that are connected with the art of cooking so as to reap the pleasure without getting sick. Thus, in music, in medicine, and in every other activity both human and divine, one should be as attentive as possible regarding each of these kinds of Love. Both will be there, since even the pattern of the seasons of the year reflect their influence.

“When the elements I have already mentioned, that is, the hot and the cold, the dry and the wet, happen to arise in a proportionate manner by means of the proper Love, they realize a harmonious and sensible mixture and bring about a good, healthy season for human beings as well as the other animals and plants, and cause no harm. However, when the outrageous Love is more in control of the seasons, it causes a lot of injury and destruction. Plagues tend to develop in such situations, and many other abnormal diseases among animals and plants, including frost, hail, and blights, which develop from the greed and disorderliness of the activities of this sort of Love in the movements of the stars and seasons of the year. (A knowledge of the activities of Love in this context is called astronomy).⁴⁴

“Moreover, all sacrifices and the matters prophecy deals with, that is, the interaction between gods and human beings, involve nothing but defending

and correcting Love. Impiety tends to result when someone does not gratify the orderly kind of Love, nor honor and respect him in every deed, but instead gratifies the other Love, both with regard to one's parents, whether they are alive or dead, and with regard to the gods. The role of watching over and ministering to these kinds of Loves has been assigned to prophecy, and, therefore, it is prophecy that is the artisan of friendly relations between gods and human beings. It understands the activities of Love among human beings and knows which ones tend toward that which is lawful and sacred. 188d

"Thus, Love as a whole has very great power, indeed, he is omnipotent, but the Love that brings about good with judiciousness⁴⁵ and justice among us as well as among the gods, he is the one that has the greatest power, provides us with every happiness, and enables us to associate with one another and to be friends with the gods, who are more powerful than us.

"Now, I probably omitted many things in my praise of Love, though not intentionally, of course. If I did leave out something, it is your task, Aristophanes, to fill in the gaps. Or, if you have in mind offering your tribute in some other manner, then offer it up, since your hiccups have ceased." 188e

Aristodemus reported that Aristophanes then took over and declared: "The hiccups did stop completely, though not until I used the sneeze treatment on them, so that I wonder if the orderly sort of Love in my body desires the kind of noises and tickles that sneezing involves, because they did stop right away when I applied the sneeze treatment!" 189a

Eryximachus replied: "Aristophanes, my good man, watch what you're doing! Though you're supposed to be giving a speech, you're making jokes, and forcing me to be on my guard against your speech in case you say something funny, when you could march out to speak in peace." 189b

Laughing, Aristophanes responded, "You're right, Eryximachus, let what I said be unsaid! Don't be on your guard against me; what I'm afraid of is not that I may say something funny (that would be a good trick and natural for my Muse),⁴⁶ but rather that I may say something ridiculous."

"Do you think you can make me a target and get away with it, Aristophanes?" Eryximachus replied. "Put your mind to it and speak as though you were going to be called to account, though I may perhaps decide to let you off." 189c

"Well, now, Eryximachus," Aristophanes said, "I, of course, have in mind a speech of a different sort from yours and Pausanias'. It seems to me that people altogether fail to perceive the power of Love, because, if they were aware of it, they would build the greatest temples and altars for him and make him the greatest offerings. As it is, he gets none of these things, although he deserves the best of everything. He is the friendliest of the gods to human beings, for he helps people and cures them of those things which stand in the way of the greatest happiness for the human race. I will try to explain his power to you, and you will be teachers for others. 189d

“You must first understand human nature and what has happened to it. In ancient times our nature was not the same as it is now, but different. At first there were three kinds of human beings, not only two as now, male and female, but also a third that was composed of the other two. Its name still survives, but that type of being no longer exists. At one time, then, there actually existed a kind of human being that was androgynous in form and name, being a combination of both male and female,⁴⁷ but they no longer exist, although the name is still used as a calumny. Now, the form of all three types of people was completely spherical, with their backs and sides making a complete circle. They had four hands and a similar number of legs, and two faces that were exactly alike on top of a circular neck. The two faces were turned in opposite directions on a single head that had four ears. There were also two sets of genitals, and all the other characteristics one could infer from these examples. They walked upright in the present manner, in whatever direction they wanted to, and whenever they set themselves to run quickly, they would revolve in a circle, like acrobats doing cartwheels, with their arms and legs sticking straight out. At that time, of course, they had eight limbs to support themselves on while they rapidly revolved.

“The reason there were these three types of humans is this: The male was originally a progeny of the sun, the female of the earth, and the one that had a share in both was a progeny of the moon, since the moon also has a share in both. They themselves were spherical like their parents, and their method of travelling was also like that of their parents.

“They had terrible strength and power, as well as grand ambitions, and they attacked the gods. Homer’s story about Ephialtes and Otus⁴⁸ is about them and their attempt to ascend the heavens in order to attack the gods. Zeus and the other gods deliberated about what they should do about them, but they were at a loss. They did not see how they could kill them and destroy the race with a lightning bolt, as they had in the case of the giants, since the honors and sacrifices they received from human beings would also be destroyed. Neither did they see how they could tolerate their outrageous behavior. Finally, after a lot of thought, Zeus declared, ‘I think I have a good idea about how human beings can continue to exist and yet, by their becoming weaker, cease their indecent behavior. I will cut each of them in two,’ he said. ‘They will be weaker and at the same time more useful to us by becoming more numerous. And they will still be able to walk upright since they will have two legs. However, if they continue to behave outrageously and refuse to live quietly,’ he continued, ‘I will cut them in two again, and they’ll have to travel around on one leg like people playing hopscotch.’⁴⁹ Having said this, he cut the human beings in two, as people slice apples when they are going to preserve them or cut eggs with hairs. As he sliced each one, he ordered Apollo to shift its face and its half-neck around toward the cut, so that when it looked at its own scar the person might be more orderly. He also instructed Apollo to heal the rest of

the incision. So Apollo turned their faces around and drew the skin together on all sides to what is now called the stomach, just as purses are pulled together with a drawstring. He tied off the single opening he had made in the middle of the stomach, making what people call the navel, and he smoothed out the many other wrinkles and constructed the chest, using the sort of tool cobblers use when they smooth out wrinkles in leather on a last. However, he left a few wrinkles around the stomach and the navel as a reminder of their past experience. 191a

“Now, since the natural form of human beings had been cut in two, each half longed for the other. So, out of their desire to grow together, they would throw their arms around each other when they met and become entwined. Hence, they began to die from hunger and other sorts of neglect, since they did not want to do anything in separation from each other. Whenever one half of a pair died and the other remained behind, the one that was left, whether it happened to be a half of a whole woman (what we now call a woman) or of a man, searched about and became entwined with someone else, and as a result they were dying out. 191b

“However, Zeus took pity on them and came up with another good idea. He moved their genitals around to the front, for until then they had them on the back side, and they fathered and conceived, not in each other, but in the ground like cicadas. So, Zeus put their genitals around on the front side and thus made it possible for them to reproduce with each other with the male's genitals inside the female's. For this reason, whenever a male happened to encounter a female in their entwining, she would conceive and produce an offspring, and if a male encountered a male, at least they would get some satisfaction from their union and they would take a break, then return to their work and attend to the rest of life. 191c

“It is from this situation, then, that love for one another developed in human beings. Love collects the halves of our original nature, and tries to make a single thing out of the two parts so as to restore our natural condition. Thus, each of us is the matching half of a human being, since we have been severed like a flatfish, two coming from one, and each part is always seeking its other half. Those men who are split from the mixed nature, which was then called ‘androgynous,’ are fond of women. Most adulterers come from this type, and those women who are fond of men and are adulteresses also come from this type. Those women who are split from a woman, however, have no interest at all in men, but rather are oriented toward women. This is the type lesbians come from. Those who are split from the male pursue males. While they are boys, since they are a slice off a male, they are fond of men and enjoy lying with men and becoming entwined with them. These are the best of the boys and young men, and at the same time are the most manly in nature. Anyone who says they are shameless is mistaken, for they do this, not from shamelessness, but from courage, manliness, and masculinity, welcoming what is like themselves. There 191d
191e
192a

is a definite proof of this: Only men of this sort are completely successful in the affairs of the city. When they become men, they are lovers of boys and by nature are not interested in marriage and having children, though they are forced into it by custom. They would be satisfied to live all the time with one another without marrying. This is certainly the sort of man who becomes a lover of boys, and as a boy is fond of such lovers, always welcoming a kinsman. 192b

“Thus, whenever a lover of boys, or anyone else, happens to encounter the person who is their other half, they are overcome with amazement at their friendship, intimacy, and love, and do not want to be severed, so to speak, from each other even for a moment. These are the people who spend their entire lives with each other, though they don’t know how to say what they want from each other. No one would think this is a mere union of sexual passion, as though that were the reason each enjoys and is so enthusiastic about being with the other. On the contrary, it is clear that there is something else—what, it cannot say—that the soul of each wants, though it does have a prophetic sense of what it wants and can speak of it in riddles. If Hephaestus⁵⁰ were holding his tools and standing over the pair lying there together, he might say: ‘What do you people want from each other?’ If they had no answer, he might continue: ‘Is this what you desire, to be together as much as possible, so that you would not leave each other day and night? If you desire that, I am willing to weld and forge you into one and the same being, so that from being two you will have become one and can henceforth live as one being, both of you sharing a single life in common. When you die, you will share a death in common, there in Hades, as one being instead of two. Consider whether you would like this and would be satisfied should this happen.’ 192c

We know that when they heard this, not a one would refuse, nor would they appear to want anything other than that. On the contrary, they would think they had discovered what they had really desired all along, namely, to be made one out of two by being joined and welded together with their beloved. 192d

“The explanation of this is that our original nature was as described above and we were once whole beings. So, the name ‘love’ is given to the desire for wholeness. Before the current situation, as I explained, we were one whole, but now, because of our misdeed, we have been made by the god to live in a separated state, as the Arcadians were by the Spartans.⁵¹ We are afraid that if we do not maintain good order in our relations with the gods we may be sliced in two again, so that we would have to go around like those figures that have been inscribed in bas-relief on stelae, sawn in two along the nose like halved dice. For this reason, every man must advocate continuous reverence for the gods in all things, so that we will avoid that fate and encounter good fortune, with Love as our guide and commander. No one should oppose him in any way, because whoever opposes the gods incurs their wrath. If we are friends with the god and on good terms, we will find and establish relationships with those darlings meant for us, which few do now. 192e

(Eryximachus should not interrupt me here, making fun of my speech as though I were speaking of Pausanias and Agathon! They probably are among those who have such relationships and are both male in nature, but I am really talking about everyone, men and women alike.) This is how the human race can become happy: We must perfect love and every man must find his own darling, thereby returning to our original nature. If this is what is best, then the nearest thing to that is necessarily the best in the present circumstances, and that is to meet up with a darling who is naturally suited to one's own outlook. 193c

"Thus, if we are to sing the praises of the god who is the cause of this, then we must sing the praises of Love. While he benefits us most in the present moment by leading us into relationships that suit us, he provides us great hope for the future: if we show proper reverence for the gods, he will restore us to our original nature and, by healing us, will make us happy and blessed. 193d

"That is my speech about Love, Eryximachus," Aristophanes said. "It's different from yours. So, as I asked you, don't make fun of it, so that we can hear what each of those who are left will say, or rather each of the other two, since only Agathon and Socrates remain." 193e

"Well, I'll do as you suggest," Eryximachus responded, according to Aristodemus, "since I did enjoy your speech. If I didn't recognize that Socrates and Agathon are terrific at the activities of love, I'd be apprehensive that they might have nothing else to say since so much has been said! However, for the moment, I remain optimistic."

Then Socrates said, "Well, you competed beautifully, Eryximachus, but if you were where I am now, or rather where I will be after Agathon gives a good speech, then you would be very apprehensive, just as I am now!" 194a

"You're trying to put a spell on me, Socrates," Agathon responded, "so that I'll be distracted by thinking about the high expectation my audience has regarding how well I will speak."

"I would be quite forgetful, Agathon," Socrates replied, "if, having seen the courage and self-confidence with which you went out on the stage with the actors and faced up to that audience with the intention of putting your own words on display, and having seen how you were not at all intimidated, I should now believe that you could be frightened by our small gathering of people." 194b

"But what about this, Socrates?" Agathon said. "Surely you don't think I'm so obsessed with the theater that I don't realize that, to anyone who's intelligent, a few sensible people are more frightening than a senseless mob?"

"I would not be behaving well, Agathon," he replied, "if I thought of you as someone boorish. On the contrary, I know perfectly well that if you should meet some people you think are wise, you would care more about their reaction than about that of any mob. We, however, are not wise ourselves—we were also there at the theater and were part of that mob. But if you did happen to meet some other people who are wise, you surely would be ashamed to do 194c

something you thought was shameful in front of them. Is that what you're saying?"

"What you say is true," he said.

"But you wouldn't be ashamed, if you thought you were doing something shameful in front of most people?"

Aristodemus reported that Phaedrus interrupted here saying, "Agathon, my friend, if you answer Socrates, he won't care whether any of our present intentions are realized, if only he has someone to engage in a dialogue with, especially if that someone is good-looking! Now, I myself enjoy listening to Socrates' dialogues, but it's my obligation to direct our praise of Love and to get a speech from each and every one of you. So, you two must first pay what is due to the god, then you can have your dialogue." 194d

"What you say is right, Phaedrus," Agathon replied, "and nothing is going to prevent me from making a speech. There'll be plenty of opportunities to engage in dialogue with Socrates later." 194e

"First of all, I want to say how I plan to approach the topic, then I'll give my speech. Everyone who spoke previously did not seem to me to praise the god, but rather to proclaim that human beings are happy about the good things of which the god is the cause. No one has talked about the character of the giver of these gifts. Yet there is only one correct way to praise someone, and it holds for everyone: The subject of the speech as well as the things of which he happens to be the source should be described in detail. Thus, it is proper that we first praise Love for who he is and then praise his gifts." 195a

"So, I say that of all the happy gods, Love (if I can say what is correct without giving offense) is the happiest among them, since he is the best and the most beautiful. He is the most beautiful for the following reasons: In the first place, he is the youngest of the gods, Phaedrus. He himself provides convincing proof of this claim in that he outruns old age, though it obviously is fast. (At any rate it catches up with us more quickly than it should.) Love naturally despises old age and will not even go near it. He is always among young people, and is young himself, for the ancient saying is correct that like always attracts like. Though I agree with Phaedrus about many things, I do not agree about this, that Love is older than Cronos and Iapetus.⁵² I say that he is the youngest of the gods, and eternally youthful, and that the ancient deeds of the gods, of which Hesiod and Parmenides speak, occurred under Necessity and not Love, if what they said is true. The castrations, imprisonments, and many other violent acts would not have occurred if Love had been there with them. On the contrary, there would have been friendship and peace, as is now the case where Love rules the gods." 195b

"Thus, he is youthful, and in addition to being young, gentle. A poet like Homer is needed to depict the gentleness of this god. Homer says the goddess Ate is also gentle (at least her feet are gentle), when he states: 195c

Her feet are gentle, for it is not on the ground
That she approaches; rather she walks along on the heads of men.⁵³

In this beautiful statement he seems to me to reveal Ate's gentleness, since she walks not on what is hard, but on what is soft. We can use the same proof of Love's being gentle, for he walks neither on the earth nor on the tops of our heads, which are really not soft at all, but on the contrary, he walks and dwells in the softest things there are. He establishes his dwelling place in the characters and souls of gods and human beings, though not in every soul that comes along. When he encounters a soul that has a hard character, he turns away, but when he comes upon a soft one, he dwells there. Thus, since he is always attached to the softest parts of the softest things, with his feet and everything else, he is necessarily most gentle. 195e

"He is the youngest and the most gentle, then, and in addition his form is pliable. If he were stiff and inflexible he would not be the one who embraces everyone. Neither would he be at first unnoticed while going in and out of every soul. His gracefulness, which everyone agrees unreservedly that Love has, is a convincing proof of his shapeliness and suppleness, since there is always a conflict between Love and awkwardness. That the god lives among flowers suggests the beauty of his complexion, for Love does not rest on what is withered or without blossom in body, soul, or any other way. If a place is full of flowers and fragrance, there he will alight and remain. 196a
196b

"That is enough about the beauties of the god, though much is omitted; now I must speak about the virtue of Love. The greatest thing is that Love neither wrongs god or human being, nor is he wronged by god or human being. He never suffers violence, if indeed he suffers anything at all, for violence has no connection with Love. Nor does he do violence when he acts, for everyone serves Love willingly in everything, and 'the laws, the kings of the city,'⁵⁴ say that what is done in willing agreement is just. Besides justice, he partakes of the greatest judiciousness, for it is agreed that judiciousness is the control of pleasure and desire, and no pleasure is more powerful than Love. If all pleasures and desires are weaker than Love, they can be controlled by Love, and he is in control. Thus, by controlling pleasure and desire Love is thoroughly judicious. Moreover, with regard to courage, 'not even Ares can stand up against' Love.⁵⁵ Ares cannot catch hold of Love, but Love (of Aphrodite, as the story goes) can catch Ares,⁵⁶ and the one who catches is more powerful than the one who is caught. Thus, the one who controls the most courageous among all others must be the bravest of all. 196c
196d

"So, the justice, judiciousness, and courage of the god have been discussed; his wisdom remains.⁵⁷ To the extent that I can, I must try not to leave anything out. First of all (I in turn will honor my profession as Eryximachus did his), the god is a poet so wise and skillful that he can make others poets also. At least, everyone Love takes hold of becomes a poet, 'even were there 196e

no song in him before.’⁵⁸ It is appropriate for us to use this as evidence that the poet Love is in general good at every creative activity associated with the Muses. What one neither has nor knows, one can neither give nor teach to another. And regarding the creation of every animal, will anyone deny that it is by the skill of Love that they are begotten and come into being? On the other hand, do we not see that the artisan who has been taught by this god turns out to be famous and illustrious, but the one whom Love does not take hold of ends up obscure? Apollo was led by desire and Love to invent archery, of course, and also medicine and prophecy, so he is a pupil of Love—as were the Muses in their invention of the fine arts, Hephaestus in blacksmithing, Athena in weaving, and Zeus in how to govern gods and human beings. It is clear from this that these activities of the gods were established when Love came into being—Love of beauty this is, for there is no Love of ugliness. Before this, as I said at the beginning, many terrible things were done by the gods, as it is said, through the rule of Necessity, but since this god was born, all good things have come into being for both gods and human beings through loving what is beautiful.

197a

197b

“Thus, Love himself seems to me, Phaedrus, first to be the most beautiful and the best and then the cause of that which is best and most beautiful in others. Something comes over me to speak also in verse, saying this is the one who

197c

Produces peace among human beings,
 Calm on the open sea, stillness of the wind,
 And sleep abed when troubled.
 He empties us of alienation and fills us with togetherness,
 Causes us all to join together with each other
 In these sorts of gatherings, and in festivals, dances, and sacrifices,
 When he becomes the leader.
 He instills meekness and banishes ferocity.
 He is a cheerful giver of goodwill,
 And never gives hostility.
 Gracious and kind, he is studied by the wise,
 And admired by the gods.
 Coveted by those who lack him,
 He is a treasure to those lucky enough to have him,
 The father of delicacy, luxury, and opulence,
 Gracefulness, longing, and yearning,
 Careful of the good,
 And careless of the bad.
 In misery, in fear, in desire, and in speech,
 He is our pilot, defender, comrade-in-arms,
 And our bravest deliverer.
 The adornment of all the gods and human beings together,

197d

197e

He is the best and most beautiful leader,
 The one whom all men should follow,
 With beautiful singing, joining in the songs he sings
 As he charms the thoughts of all
 The gods and human beings.

"That is my speech, Phaedrus," he said. "Let it be dedicated to the god. It's partly playful and partly serious, and as good a job as I am capable of."

Aristodemus said that after Agathon had spoken, everyone present loudly 198a
 applauded the young man's remarks as reflecting well both on himself and on the god. Then Socrates, looking over at Eryximachus, declared, "Well, does it seem to you now, son of Acumenus, that my earlier apprehension was unfounded, or did I speak prophetically when I said just now that Agathon would give an astonishing speech and I would be left in the lurch?"

"One of your claims is true," Eryximachus responded. "You do seem to me to have spoken prophetically in saying that Agathon would speak well, but that you are left in the lurch, that I do not believe."

"And how, you happy fellow," Socrates replied, "could I not be in the 198b
 lurch, I and anyone else whatsoever, when I have to speak after such a beautiful and elaborate speech has been given? The rest of it was not as astonishing, but that concluding section! How could anyone who heard the beauty of those words and phrases not be struck dumb by them? When I thought about the fact that I wouldn't be able to speak with nearly such beautiful words as those, I would have left in a moment, running away in shame, if I had any place to 198c

go! His speech made me think of Gorgias,⁵⁹ so that I was struggling on like that character in Homer: I was afraid that at the end Agathon would hold up the terrifying head of Gorgias in his speech, cast it against my speech, and turn me into a wordless stone.⁶⁰ Then I realized that it was ridiculous of me to have agreed to join with you in praising Love and to have claimed that I was terrific in the activities of Love when I knew nothing about this practice, that 198d
 is, how one ought to praise things. In my simple-mindedness I thought one ought to tell the truth about the things being praised, and to begin with that. From there, then, one should pick out the finest of these points and present them in the most attractive manner. Moreover, I had complete confidence that I would speak well, since I knew the truth about how to praise anything at all.

"It seems now, however, that this is not the way to praise something in a beautiful manner. On the contrary, one should attribute the grandest and most beautiful characteristics to the subject, whether it possesses them or not, and if 198e
 the attribution is a lie, it doesn't matter. It was prescribed, it seems, that each of us should seem to praise Love, not that we should actually praise him. I believe that's the reason you twisted every statement around to apply to Love. You claimed that he is a certain sort of being and the cause of certain sorts of things so that he would appear to be the most beautiful and the best—to those

who are not acquainted with him, obviously, since I presume this would not be effective with those who do know him. And your praise was beautifully and impressively presented. However, I didn't know this would be our method of praising, and I did not know this when I agreed to offer my praise in turn with you. 'The tongue uttered it, but not the heart!'⁶¹ Well, let it go. Still, I'm not going to offer praise in that manner—I'm not capable of doing so! I am willing, if you like, to state the truth, and nothing else, in my own way, and not in competition with your speeches, lest I provide a ridiculous spectacle. So, Phaedrus, consider whether you want a speech of that sort, that is, do you want to hear the truth spoken about Love, with the terms and the ordering of the phrases presented in whatever manner they happen to emerge?" 199a

Aristodemus said that Phaedrus and the others ordered him to make his speech in whatever manner he believed he ought to speak.

"One further thing, Phaedrus," Socrates continued, "you must let me ask Agathon a few questions, so that I can get his agreement to some points before I give my speech."

"Well, I'll allow it," Phaedrus replied. "Question him." 199c

Aristodemus said that after that Socrates began in this manner: "Well now, Agathon my friend, you seemed to me to get your speech off to a good start when you said that one must first describe what sort of qualities Love has and then describe his accomplishments. I greatly admire that beginning. So come, since you described everything else about who he is so beautifully and magnificently, tell me this about Love also. Is Love a love of something, or of nothing? I'm not asking whether Love is the love of a mother or a father (asking whether Love is a mother's or a father's love would be ridiculous) but rather it's as though I were asking about the father himself. Is a father the father of someone, or not? Obviously, if you wanted to answer well, you would say to me that a father is the father of a son or a daughter, wouldn't you?" 199d

"By all means," Agathon responded.

"And the same goes for a mother, as well?"

This was also agreed to.

"Well, then," Socrates said, "answer a few more questions, so that you will have a better understanding of what I'm after. If I ask: 'What about this? A brother, just insofar as he is a brother, is that to be a brother of someone, or not?'" 199e

He said that it is.

"So, he is the brother of a brother or a sister?"

He agreed.

"Then try and tell me about Love," Socrates said. "Is Love a love of nothing or of something?"

"By all means, he is of something."

"Now, remember what that is," Socrates continued, "and keep it in mind, 200a

while you tell me this: With regard to that which Love is a love of, does he desire it, or not?"

"By all means, he does," he replied.

"Is it while he has this thing he desires and loves that he desires and loves it, or is it when he does not have it?"

"It seems likely that it's when he doesn't have it," Agathon said.

"Consider now," Socrates responded, "whether, instead of its seeming likely, it is in fact necessarily the case that what desires, desires what it lacks and does not desire what it does not lack. It seems wondrously obvious to me, Agathon, that this is necessarily so, but how does it seem to you?" 200b

"It seems so to me, also," he replied.

"Well spoken. Now then, would someone who was large want to be large, or someone who was strong to be strong?"

"That would be impossible, given what we have agreed."

"Because the person who has these characteristics would not lack them."

"What you say is true."

"If someone who is strong did want to be strong," Socrates continued, "or who is swift to be swift, or who is healthy to be healthy, one might suppose, in such cases, that those who are all these things and possess these sorts of characteristics do also desire them while they have them. (I'm bringing this up so that we won't be misled.) Yet, if you reflect on these cases, Agathon, you will see that insofar as these people have something at a given moment, they necessarily have it, whether they want it or not, and how could anyone desire to have what they already have? Whenever someone says, 'while I am healthy, I also want to be healthy,' or 'while I am wealthy, I also want to be wealthy,' or 'I desire these very things that I have,' we will say to him, 'My good fellow, while you possess wealth, health, and strength, what you also want is to possess them in the future as well, since at the present moment you already have them, whether you want them or not. Consider: When you say, "I desire my present possessions," do you mean anything other than this: "I also want to possess my present possessions in the future as well"?' Would he agree?" 200c

Aristodemus said that Agathon consented.

Socrates continued, "So, is this what love is of in such a case: what is not in hand and what one does not have, namely, the preservation of these things as one's possessions in the future?"

"By all means," he responded. 200e

"Then, such a person, and everyone else who desires, desires what is not in hand and not present, that is, what one does not have, what one is not oneself, what one lacks. Is this the sort of thing that love and desire are of?"

"By all means," he said.

"Come then," Socrates said, "let's agree about what's being said. First, is Love the love of something, and, second, is that something some thing that at the moment he lacks?"

“Yes,” he replied.

201a

“In that case, besides these points, recall what you said Love is in your speech. If you want, I’ll remind you. I think you said something like this, that the gods’ actions were motivated by love of beautiful things, for there is no love of what is ugly and shameful. Didn’t you say something like that?”

“I did say that,” Agathon replied.

“And that was a reasonable thing to say, my friend,” Socrates responded. “If that’s so, could Love be anything other than a love of beauty and not a love of what is ugly?”

He agreed that it couldn’t be.

“Well, wasn’t it agreed that what he lacks and does not have, that is what he loves?” 201b

“Yes,” he said.

“Then, Love lacks and does not have beauty.”

“Necessarily,” he responded.

“But what about this? Do you say that what lacks beauty and does not possess beauty in any sense is beautiful?”

“Certainly not.”

“Then, do you still agree that Love is beautiful, if this is so?”

Agathon asserted, “It seems likely, Socrates, that I didn’t know what I was talking about earlier.”

“Well, you did speak beautifully, Agathon,” Socrates said. “But go on a bit more. Doesn’t it seem to you that what is good is also beautiful?” 201c

“It does to me.”

“Then, if Love lacks what is beautiful and what is good is beautiful, he would also lack what is good?”

“I myself cannot refute you, Socrates,” he replied. “Let it be as you say.”

“No, Agathon, my friend, it’s the truth you’re unable to refute, since it’s not difficult to refute Socrates. But I’ll leave you alone now.” 201d

“I once heard an account of Love from a Mantinean woman named Diotima⁶² who was wise and skillful in this and many other things. At one time, by having the Athenians offer sacrifices before the plague occurred, she produced a ten-year postponement of the disease for them, and she instructed me in the activities of Love. I’ll try as well as I can to repeat her account for you on my own, using as a basis what was agreed to by Agathon and myself.

“As you noted, Agathon, one must first describe Love and his character, and then his works. I think the easiest thing would be for me to proceed as the foreign woman did, describing how she questioned me at that time. I was saying to her more or less the sorts of things Agathon was just now to me: How Love is a great god and is beautiful. And she made the assertions to me that I made just now: How according to my account Love could be neither beautiful nor good.” 201e

“What are you saying, Diotima?” I replied. “Is Love then ugly and bad?”

"What a thing to say!" she responded. "Do you think that if a thing isn't beautiful, it must be ugly?"

"Most certainly."

202a

"Is someone who isn't wise, ignorant? Don't you perceive that there's something between wisdom and ignorance?"⁶³

"What's that?"

"Don't you know about having correct opinions without being able to give an account of them?" she said. "That isn't having knowledge, for how could what lacks an account be knowledge? Nor is it ignorance, for how could what happens to be accurate be ignorance? Correct opinion is just this sort of thing, something in between understanding and ignorance."

"What you're saying is true," I said.

"Then, don't say that what isn't beautiful is necessarily ugly, or that what isn't good is necessarily bad. When you agree that Love is neither good nor beautiful, don't then assume that he must be ugly and bad. On the contrary," she said, "he is in between these two."

202b

"And yet," I responded, "it's agreed by everyone that he is a great god."

"Are you talking about all those who lack knowledge," she said, "or those who know?"

"Why, all of them together."

She laughed and said, "How, Socrates, could it be agreed by those who say he's not a god at all that he's a great god?"

202c

"Who are these people?" I responded.

"You are one," she replied, "and I am one."

"How can you say that?" I exclaimed.

"Easily," she responded. "Tell me, wouldn't you say that all the gods are happy and beautiful? Or would you venture to say that some of the gods are not beautiful and happy?"

"By Zeus, not I!" I said.

"Do you say, then, that the happy are those who possess good and beautiful things?"

"By all means."

"Yet, you have agreed that Love, because he lacks good and beautiful things, desires these very things that he lacks."

202d

"I have agreed to that."

"So, how could one who has no share in good and beautiful things be a god?"

"He couldn't in any way, it seems."

"Then, do you see," she continued, "that even you believe that Love is not a god?"

"Then, what is Love?" I replied, "a mortal?"

"That least of all!"

"But what, then?"

“Just as in the earlier cases,” she responded, “he’s in between mortal and immortal.”

“What is he, then, Diotima?”

“A great daimon,⁶⁴ Socrates. Everything that is daimonic is between god and mortal.”

202e

“What does a daimon do?” I asked.

“It interprets and conveys things to the gods from human beings and to human beings from the gods—entreaties and sacrifices from the one, and from the other commands and gifts in return for the sacrifices. Since it is in the middle it fills in between the two so that the whole is bound together by it. All prophecy comes through a daimon, and the arts of the priests and of those concerned with sacrifices, rituals, spells, divinations, and magic. A god does not have direct contact with a human being; on the contrary every interchange and conversation between gods and human beings is through a daimon, both when we are awake and in our dreams. The man who is wise and skillful in these matters is daimonic, but the man who is skilled in any other arts or crafts is a mere laborer. There are in fact many of these daimons of all sorts, and Love is one of them.”

203a

“Who’s his father,” I asked, “and his mother?”

“It’s a rather lengthy story to go through in detail,” she replied, “but I’ll tell it to you. On the occasion of Aphrodite’s birth, some of the gods, including Resource, the son of Invention, were having a feast to celebrate. After they had eaten, Poverty, who’d come to beg since it was such a festive occasion, was standing at the door. Then Resource, who was drunk on nectar (wine didn’t exist yet), wandered out into Zeus’s garden in a stupor and fell asleep. Poverty, because of her lack of resources, contrived a plan to have a child by Resource, and she lay down beside him and conceived Love. Because of this, Love became a follower and servant of Aphrodite, since he was conceived on the day of her birth, and he is also a lover of what is beautiful because Aphrodite is beautiful.”

203b

203c

“Hence, since he is the son of Resource and Poverty, Love’s circumstances are as follows: In the first place, he’s always poor and far from being gentle and beautiful, as most people believe. On the contrary, he’s tough, wrinkled, barefooted, and homeless. He always lies on the ground, since he doesn’t have a bed, and he sleeps in doorways and alongside the road in the open air. Since he has his mother’s nature, he’s always wedded to need. Yet on the other hand, in keeping with his father, he’s a schemer after beautiful and good things, is brave, eager, and intense, a terrific hunter, always inventing some device, desirous of understanding, and resourceful. He engages in the search for wisdom⁶⁵ throughout his entire life, and is a terrific wizard, sorcerer, and Sophist. He is by nature neither immortal nor mortal, but at one and the same time he is both flourishing and alive, while he is well-provisioned, and then dying, but is brought to life again through his father’s nature. His provi-

203d

203e

sions are always draining away, so that Love is never either without resources or wealthy. He's also between wisdom and ignorance. This is the situation: None of the gods engages in the search for wisdom or desires to become wise (because they are wise), nor does anyone else who is wise engage in the search for wisdom. Nor, on the other hand, do those who are ignorant engage in the search for wisdom or desire to become wise. This is precisely what is harmful about ignorance: since the person who doesn't believe he lacks anything doesn't desire what he doesn't think he is in need of, an ignorant person, who is neither beautiful and good nor intelligent, considers himself satisfactory." 204a

"So, who are those who engage in the search for wisdom, Diotima," I asked, "if they are neither the wise nor the ignorant?"

"It should be clear by now, even to a child," she replied, "that it's those who are in between these two conditions, and Love is one of them. For wisdom is a very beautiful thing, and Love is the love of the beautiful. Thus, Love is necessarily one who engages in the search for wisdom,⁶⁶ and as a seeker of wisdom is in between being wise and being ignorant. His birth accounts for this, since his father was wise and resourceful, but his mother was not wise and lacked resources." 204b

"So, that's the nature of a daimon, Socrates, my friend. It's not at all surprising that you held the view of Love you did. From what you were saying, it seems to me that you believed Love to be the thing that is loved, rather than the one who loves. I think that's why Love appeared to you to be so beautiful. The beloved is in reality the one that is beautiful, graceful, perfect, and most blessed. The one who loves has a different sort of character, which I have described." 204c

I responded, "Well! You are a welcome visitor, Diotima, and you state your point very beautifully. If Love is this sort of thing, of what use is he to human beings?"

"I'll try to teach you that next, Socrates," she said. "Now, Love is this sort of being and his birth was in that manner, and, as you say, he is 'of beautiful things.' But what would you say if someone were to ask us, 'What is love of beautiful things, Socrates and Diotima?' Or, more clearly, 'the one who loves, loves beautiful things, but for what does he love them?'" 204d

I said that it was for them to become his own.

"That answer requires an additional question," she continued. "What will this person have, if beautiful things become his own?"

"I cannot provide a ready answer for that question," I replied.

"Well," she said, "suppose one were to replace 'beautiful' with 'good' and then ask: 'Come, Socrates, the one who loves, loves good things, but for what does he love them?'" 204e

"For them to become his own," I replied.

"And what will this person have, if good things become his own?"

"That," I said, "I am better prepared to answer: That person will be happy."

“Because happy people are happy through possessing good things,” she continued, “and there’s no need to ask beyond that, ‘What does the person who wants to be happy want?’ This seems to be a final and complete answer.” 205a

“What you say is true,” I replied.

“Do you think that this yearning, this love, is common to all human beings, and that everyone wants good things to be their own forever? What would you say?”

“As you say,” I replied, “it’s common to all.”

“Then why is it, Socrates,” she asked, “that we don’t speak of everyone as loving, if in fact everyone does always love these very things? Why do we speak instead of some people as loving and others as not?” 205b

“I wonder about that myself,” I replied.

“But you shouldn’t wonder,” she said. “We separate off one particular form of love and call it ‘love,’ giving it the name of the whole. We also mis-use other names in such ways.”

“Can you give me an example?” I asked.

“Here’s one: You know that there are various kinds of creativity,⁶⁷ since every time something that did not exist comes into being creativity is responsible. The productions of every art and craft are the result of creativity, and all of their practitioners are creative people.” 205c

“What you say is true.”

“Nevertheless,” she continued, “you know that these practitioners are not all called creative people. On the contrary, they have various other names. Yet from the whole of creativity the one part that deals with music and verse was set aside and is referred to by the name of the whole. This latter alone is called creativity, and those engaging in this part of creativity are the people who are called creative.”

“What you say is true,” I said.

“Well, that’s the way it is with love, also. In general, every desire by everyone for good things and for happiness is ‘all-powerful and treacherous Love.’⁶⁸ Yet those who turn to him in his diverse forms (whether in connection with making money, with fondness for athletics, or with philosophy), are not spoken of as loving, nor are they called lovers.⁶⁹ Rather, those who go after one particular form of love, and zealously pursue it, have the name of the whole, love, and they are spoken of as loving and are called lovers.” 205d

“You’re probably telling the truth,” I responded.

“A certain speech claims,” she continued, “that lovers are those who seek their other halves, but my account states that love is of neither the half nor the whole, unless, my friend, it happens to be good, since people are willing even to have their hands and feet cut off if they think they’re harmful to them. I don’t think people hold on to something that is their own unless one calls that which is personal and one’s own ‘good’ and what belongs to another ‘bad.’ People don’t love anything other than what is good. Does it seem otherwise to you?” 205e

"Not to me, by Zeus," I replied.

206a

"Well, then," she said, "can we simply say that people love what is good?"

"Yes," I replied.

"But what about this?" she asked. "Shouldn't we add that they love for the good to be their own?"

"We should add that."

"And not only to be their own," she continued, "but to be such forever?"

"We should add that also."

"In short, then," she said, "love is of the good's being one's own forever."

"What you say is most true," I responded.

"Given that that is what love always is," she continued, "in connection with what sort of behavior and what activity on the part of those pursuing the good would their zeal and effort be called love? What is the function of love? Can you say?"

206b

"I would not be so impressed by you and your wisdom, Diotima, if I could," I responded, "nor would I be coming to you in order to learn those very things."

"Then I'll tell you," she said. "It is giving birth in beauty both in body and in soul."

"The services of a prophet are needed to determine what you mean," I said. "I don't understand."

"Then, I'll speak more clearly," she said. "All human beings are pregnant, Socrates, both in body and in soul, and when we come of age, we naturally desire to give birth. Yet one cannot possibly give birth in ugliness, only in beauty, because the union of a man and a woman, that is, birth, is a divine affair. Pregnancy and procreation instill immortality in a living, mortal being, and these things are impossible in what lacks harmony. And ugliness is disharmonious with everything divine, while beauty is harmonious. Thus, Beauty is involved in procreation as the Fate and the Goddess of Childbirth. This is why, when something that is pregnant comes close to something beautiful, it becomes gentle and relaxes in the delight of procreation and giving birth. When it comes near something ugly, however, it recoils and turns away, frowning and distressed. It shrinks back and does not bring forth, but instead painfully continues to carry the foetus it contains. Thus, in someone who is pregnant and bursting with life, there is great excitement in the presence of what is beautiful because it is freed of the great labor pains it had. So, Socrates," she declared, "love is not of the beautiful, as you think."

206c

206d

206e

"Then, what is it of?"

"It is of procreation and giving birth in beauty."

"Well!" I replied.

"By all means, it is!" she said. "Now, why is it of procreation? Because

procreation is eternal and immortal, insofar as anything can be such in a mortal being, and, given what we've agreed, one necessarily desires immortality along with the good, since love is of the good's being one's own forever. On the basis of this account, love is necessarily also of immortality." 207a

So, she taught me all these things when she was making her arguments about the activities of love, and one time she asked, "Socrates, what do you think is the cause of this love, this desire? Don't you see how terribly it affects all the wild animals, both those that run on the ground and those that fly, when they desire to procreate? Do you see how they are all stricken and affected by the activities of love, first in intercourse with each other and then in taking care of their young? And how ready the weakest among them are to fight the strongest for the sake of their offspring, and even to die for them? Do you see how they will exhaust themselves by starving in order to feed their young, and would do anything else for them? One assumes that human beings do these sorts of things on the basis of reason,⁷⁰ but what causes wild animals to be so affected by the activities of love? Can you say?" 207b
207c

I again said that I didn't know, and she replied, "Then, how do you expect to become terrific at the activities of love, if you don't comprehend these matters?"

"But that's why I've come to you, Diotima, as I explained earlier, because I know I need to be educated. So, tell me the explanation of these things and of any other affairs connected with the activities of love."

"Then," she replied, "if you believe that by nature the object of love is what we have several times agreed it to be, you won't be surprised by my answer. My claim here is the same as in the former case: mortal nature seeks as far as possible to be eternal and immortal, and it is only in this way, by producing offspring, that it is able to do so, through always leaving behind another, a young one, in place of the old. It is also on this basis that each individual living being is said to be the same individual during its lifetime. For example, as one develops from childhood to old age one is said to be the same person, although one never has the same elements in oneself even though one is called the same person. On the contrary, one is always undergoing renewal while losing some element of one's hair, flesh, bones, blood, and all parts of the body generally. This is so not only with regard to one's body, but also with regard to one's soul. One's habits, characteristics, opinions, desires, pleasures, pains, fears, none of these ever stays the same in anybody; some are coming into being while others are passing away. Yet even more odd than these points is the fact that not only do bits of knowledge come and go for us (we are never the same even in terms of our knowledge), but each single bit of knowledge also undergoes the same experience. What is called studying exists because knowledge goes away. Forgetting is the departure of knowledge, and study saves the knowledge by reimplanting a new memory in place of what has gone away, so that it seems to be the same knowledge. Everything 207d
207e
208a

that is mortal is preserved in this way, not by being the same in every way forever, like what is divine, but by having what is old and departing leave behind another like itself that is new. By this means, Socrates," she continued, "a mortal thing participates in immortality, both in terms of its body and in all other regards. An immortal thing operates in a different way. So, you shouldn't be surprised when everything, by virtue of its nature, values its own offspring. In every case, this zeal, this love is in pursuit of immortality." 208b

When I heard her account I was astonished. "Well!" I said, "wisest Diotima, can it be true that things really are this way?"

In the manner of those perfect Sophists, she responded, "You know it, Socrates!⁷¹ When, if you will, you look at people's fondness for fame, you may be surprised by their irrationality, unless you keep in mind what I have said and consider how terribly inflamed they are by a love of becoming a famous name and 'laying down immortal glory for eternal time,'⁷² and how they're ready to face every danger for this—even more than for the sake of their children, to squander their money, to endure any pain, and even to die. Do you think," she continued, "that Alcestis would have given her life for Admetus,⁷³ or that Achilles would have sought out death after Patroclus died,⁷⁴ or your own Codrus would have sought to be the first to die for the sake of his sons' kingdom,⁷⁵ unless they thought there would be the immortal memory of their virtue that we now have? That's a long way from being the case," she said. "On the contrary, I believe all these people engage in these famous deeds in order to gain immortal virtue and a glorious reputation, and the better people they are, the more they do so, because they love immortality." 208c

"Now, those who are pregnant in body are more oriented toward women and are lovers in that way, providing immortality, remembrance, and happiness for themselves for all time, as they believe, by producing children. Those who are pregnant in soul however—for there are people who are even more pregnant in their souls than in their bodies," she continued, "these people are pregnant with and give birth to what is appropriate for the soul. What, then, is it that it is appropriate for the soul to bring forth? Good sense⁷⁶ and the rest of virtue, of which all poets are procreators, as well as those artisans who are said to be inventors. But much the most important and most beautiful aspect of good sense," she said, "is that which deals with the regulation of cities and households, the name of which is judiciousness⁷⁷ and justice." 208d

"Whenever someone who has been pregnant in his soul with these things from youth, and who is reaching adulthood and coming into his prime, desires to give birth and produce offspring, he goes around, I believe, searching for something beautiful, with which he can produce offspring. He can never produce offspring with something that is ugly. Hence, since he is pregnant with these things, he eagerly embraces beautiful bodies rather than ugly ones, and should he happen upon someone who has a beautiful, well-bred, and naturally gifted soul as well, he embraces the combination with great enthusiasm and 209a

immediately engages in many conversations with this man about virtue, about what a good man should be like, and what he should make it his business to do; thus, he sets out to educate him. When he attaches himself to someone beautiful, I believe, and associates with him, he gives birth and brings forth what he was pregnant with before, both while in that person's presence and while remembering him when he's absent. Together with him he nurtures the offspring produced, so that such men have much more to share with each other and a stronger friendship than that which comes from rearing children, since they share in the rearing of children who are more beautiful and more immortal. 209c

"Everyone would prefer to bring forth this sort of children rather than human offspring. People are envious of Homer, Hesiod, and the other good poets because of the offspring they left behind, since these are the sort of offspring that, being immortal themselves, provide their procreators with an immortal glory and an immortal remembrance. There are also, if you like," she continued, "those children whom Lycurgus left behind in Sparta as the saviors of Sparta and even, one could say, of all Greece.⁷⁸ You also honor Solon because of the laws that are his offspring, and there are other men in many places who are honored for other reasons. Among both Greeks and barbarians are men who have produced many beautiful works, bringing forth virtue of every sort. Many shrines have been dedicated to men because of this sort of children, but none at all because of their human offspring. 209d

"These are the activities of love, Socrates, into which you could probably be initiated. I don't know whether you are the sort of person for the final rites and mysteries, for which these former things are the preparation, if one can let go in the right way. So, I'll speak," she said, "and I'll not curtail my enthusiasm. Try to follow as well as you can. 209e

"The person who is going to approach this matter correctly," she declared, "must begin while young to turn toward beautiful bodies, and at first, if he is correctly led by his guide, to love a single body and to bring forth beautiful conversations in that situation. He must then realize that the beauty of any particular body is akin to the beauty of every other body, and that if it is necessary to pursue beauty of form, it is quite mindless not to believe that the beauty of all bodies is one and the same. When he comprehends this, he must become a lover of all beautiful bodies, and he will despise that vehement love of a single body, thinking it a trivial matter. 210b

"After that he must believe that the beauty of souls is more valuable than that of the body, so that if someone who has a decent soul is not very attractive, he will be content to love him, to take care of him, and with him to search out and give birth to the sort of conversations that make young men better. As a result, he will be compelled to study the beauty in practical endeavors and in laws and traditions and to see that all beauty is related so that he will believe that the beauty connected with the body is of little importance. 210c

"After practical endeavors he must be led to examples of knowledge in

order that he may see in turn the beauty of knowledge and no longer look upon what is limited to an individual case as being very beautiful, like a house-slave who is enthralled by what is paltry and of little account, lusting after the beauty of a young boy or of some particular person, or of a single practical endeavor. On the contrary, after turning toward the great sea of beauty, he studies it and gives birth to many splendidly beautiful conversations and thoughts in a magnanimous philosophy, until, as he becomes more capable and flourishes in this situation, he comes to see a knowledge of a singular sort that is of this kind of beauty. 210d

"You must try," she continued, "to pay attention to me as closely as you can. The person who has been instructed thus far about the activities of Love, who studies beautiful things correctly and in their proper order, and who then comes to the final stage of the activities of love, will suddenly see something astonishing that is beautiful in its nature. This, Socrates, is the purpose of all the earlier effort. 210e

"In the first place, it is eternal; it neither comes into being nor passes away, neither increases nor diminishes. Therefore, it is not beautiful in one respect while ugly in another, nor beautiful at one time while ugly at another, nor beautiful with reference to one thing while ugly with reference to something else, nor beautiful here while ugly there, as though it were beautiful to some while ugly to others. Moreover, the beautiful will not appear to this person to be something like a face or a pair of hands or any other part of the body, nor will it appear as a particular statement or a particular bit of knowledge, nor will it appear to exist somewhere in something other than itself, such as in an animal, in the earth, in the sky, or in anything else. On the contrary, it exists as itself in accordance with itself, eternal and uniform. All other beautiful things partake of it in such a way that, although they come into being and pass away, it does not, nor does it become any greater or any less, nor is it affected in any way. When someone moves through these various stages from the correct love of young boys and begins to see this beauty, he has nearly reached the end. 211a

"In the activities of Love, this is what it is to proceed correctly, or be led by another: Beginning from beautiful things to move ever onwards for the sake of that beauty, as though using ascending steps, from one body to two and from two to all beautiful bodies, from beautiful bodies to beautiful practical endeavors, from practical endeavors to beautiful examples of understanding, and from examples of understanding to come finally to that understanding which is none other than the understanding of that beauty itself, so that in the end he knows what beauty itself is. 211c

"Here is the life, Socrates, my friend," said the Mantinean visitor, "that a human being should live—studying the beautiful itself. Should you ever see it, it will not seem to you to be on the level of gold, clothing, and beautiful boys and youths, who so astound you now when you look at them that you and many 211d

others are eager to gaze upon your darlings and be together with them all the time. You would cease eating and drinking, if that were possible, and instead just look at them and be with them. What do we think it would be like," she said, "if someone should happen to see the beautiful itself, pure, clear, unmixed, and not contaminated with human flesh and color and a lot of other mortal silliness, but rather if he were able to look upon the divine, uniform beautiful itself? Do you think," she continued, "it would be a worthless life for a human being to look at that, to study it in the required way, and to be together with it? Aren't you aware," she said, "that only there with it, when a person sees the beautiful in the only way it can be seen, will he ever be able to give birth, not to imitations of virtue, since he would not be reaching out toward an imitation, but to true virtue, because he would be taking hold of what is true? By giving birth to true virtue and nourishing it, he would be able to become a friend of the gods, and if any human being could become immortal, he would."

211e

212a

"This, then, Phaedrus and the rest of you, is what Diotima said, and I was persuaded. Now, since I am persuaded, I also try to persuade others that one could not easily find a better collaborator with human nature for acquiring this than Love. That's why I say that every man must honor Love, and I myself honor the activities of Love, practice them industriously, and encourage others to do so. Both now and always, I praise Love's power and courage to the extent of my ability. So, Phaedrus, if you will, consider this account my hymn of praise, delivered for Love, though if you would prefer to call it something else, call it that."

212b

212c

Everyone applauded after Socrates concluded his speech, except for Aristophanes, who tried to say something about how Socrates referred to his own speech in his remarks. Suddenly, there was a loud noise of what sounded like festive drinkers pounding on the courtyard door, and they heard the sound of a flute-girl. Agathon then called out, "Why don't you servants see what that is? If it's someone we know, invite him in, and if it isn't, say that we've already finished and are no longer drinking."

212d

Almost immediately they heard Alcibiades'⁷⁹ voice in the courtyard (he was extremely drunk and shouting loudly) asking where Agathon was and demanding that they lead him to Agathon.⁸⁰ So, with the flute-girl and several of his companions supporting him, they led him before them, and he stood at the door, crowned with a thick wreath of ivy and violets and wearing a great many ribbons on his head.

212e

"Greetings, gentlemen!" he said. "Will you accept a quite excessively drunk man as a fellow imbibor? Or should we just leave after crowning Agathon, which is the reason we came? I wasn't able to come myself, yesterday," he said, "but I'm here now with these ribbons on my head so that I can make a crown for the head of the wisest and most beautiful of us all from my own head, if I may speak in that way. Are you laughing at me for being drunk? You may laugh, but I nevertheless know quite well that what I'm say-

ing is true. But tell me right now, will you do what I propose? Will you imbibe with me or not?" 213a

They all called out loudly and insisted that he come in and recline with them, and Agathon beckoned him over. So, he went in, assisted by his companions. He was taking off his crown of ribbons as he entered, so that they were covering his eyes, and he didn't notice Socrates. He sat down next to Agathon, in between Socrates and the latter (Socrates had moved over when he saw him). And as he sat down beside him, he embraced Agathon and put a crown of ribbons on his head. 213b

Then Agathon said, "Take off Alcibiades' sandals, boy, so that he can recline with us as a third."

"By all means," Alcibiades responded, "but who is this third fellow drinking with us?" He turned around then and saw Socrates, and when he saw him he leapt up and said, "Oh Heracles, what is this? Is this Socrates? You're lying here in ambush for me again, aren't you? And suddenly showing up where I least expect you to be, as you often do. Why have you come now? And why are you reclining on this couch? How is it you're not beside Aristophanes or someone else who's an intentional jokester, but instead have somehow found a way to recline beside the most beautiful man in the room?" 213c

At this point Socrates responded, "See here, Agathon, will you defend me? My love for this fellow is not an insignificant affair. Since the time I fell in love with him, it has been impossible for me to glance at or have a conversation with a beautiful person, not even one, or else he treats me in an amazing manner out of resentment and jealousy. He rails at me and can scarcely restrain himself from hitting me! So watch out, lest he do something right now. Try to adjudicate between us, or if he begins to get violent, defend me, as I am very frightened by this fellow's madness and loving friendship." 213d

"Wait!" Alcibiades replied. "There is no reconciling you and me. On the contrary, I'll be getting even with you for those remarks later on. But for the moment, Agathon," he continued, "give me some of those ribbons, so that I can also crown the amazing head of this fellow. Then he won't complain to me that I've made a crown for you, but not for him, although in the arena of words he triumphs over every human being, and not only just recently as you did, but all the time." Then he took the ribbons, crowned Socrates, and lay down on the couch. 213e

When he was settled, he said, "Well, gentlemen, you seem sober to me. Now, that can't be permitted. You must drink! We've agreed to that. So, I choose as the person to lead the drinking (until you've imbibed enough)—myself! Bring me a large mug, Agathon, if there is one. But wait, that's not necessary. Boy," he said, "fetch me that wine cooler over there." (He saw that it could hold more than two quarts.) After this container was filled, he first drank it off himself and then ordered it refilled for Socrates. At the same time he said, "With Socrates, gentlemen, my ploy won't succeed. No matter how 214a

much anyone orders him to drink, he drinks it and still never gets drunk." So, when the boy refilled it, Socrates drained it.

Then Eryximachus said, "What are we doing, Alcibiades? Aren't we going to say anything over the cup or sing something? Are we going to just guzzle it down like we were dying of thirst?" 214b

Alcibiades replied, "Ah, Eryximachus, the best son of the best and most judicious father. Greetings!"

"Greetings yourself," Eryximachus said, "but what are we going to do?"

"You should give the orders, Eryximachus, because we ought to obey you, 'since a medical man is worth many others.'⁸¹ Prescribe whatever you like."

"Then listen," Eryximachus replied. "Before you came in, we decided that each of us would make the most beautiful speech he could in praise of Love, going in turn around to the right. Now, all the rest of us have already given our speeches, but since you haven't spoken (though you have been drinking!), it's fair that you should have to give a speech. After you've spoken you can make whatever demand you like of Socrates, and he can do the same to the person on his right, and so on for the rest." 214c

"That's a good suggestion, Eryximachus," Alcibiades responded, "but it wouldn't be an equal match to put a drunken man up against the speeches of people who are sober. Anyway, you blessed fellow, were you persuaded by any of the things Socrates was just saying? Do you realize that everything is just the opposite from what he said? Whenever I praise someone around him, whether it's a god, another human being, or anyone, it's this fellow who can't restrain himself from hitting me!" 214d

"What a thing to say!" Socrates responded.

"By Poseidon!"⁸² Alcibiades said. "Don't you deny it! I can't praise anyone else when you're around."

"Then do what you're saying," replied Eryximachus. "If you like, praise Socrates."

"What do you mean?" Alcibiades responded. "Do you think that's what I should do, Eryximachus? Should I attack the man and have my revenge right here in front of all of you?" 214e

"Here now!" Socrates exclaimed. "What do you have in mind? Are you going to praise me in a manner that will make me a laughingstock? What're you going to do?"

"I shall tell the truth. Will you allow that?"

"Of course, I'll allow that," he replied. "In fact, I command you to tell the truth!"

"I won't hesitate to do so," Alcibiades said, "and you should do this: If I say anything that's not true, interrupt me, if you like, and say that I'm mistaken about that. I won't say anything that's false if I can avoid it, but if I do get things out of order in my recollecting, don't be surprised. It isn't easy for 215a

a man in my state to produce an account of your odd behavior in a fluent and orderly manner.

"Now, this is the way I will attempt to praise Socrates, gentlemen, by means of images. He'll probably think that it's to make him a laughingstock, but the image aims at truth. It's not a joke. I would say that what he's most similar to are the Sileni⁸³ that sit in the statue-makers' shops,⁸⁴ the ones artisans make that hold shepherd's pipes or flutes,⁸⁵ which when pulled apart are found to have statues of gods inside. Moreover, I would say that he's especially like the Satyr Marsyas.⁸⁶ 215b

"That your form is similar to theirs, Socrates, you yourself can't deny.⁸⁷ Moreover, listen to some other ways you're like them. You behave outrageously, don't you? If you disagree, I'll provide witnesses. And you're a flute-player, aren't you? In fact, you're a more amazing one than Marsyas. He used instruments to bewitch human beings with the power that emanated from his mouth, as do those who play his tunes today. (I claim the tunes Olympus⁸⁸ played were those of Marsyas, since he was Olympus' teacher.) Thus, if a good flute-player, or even a poor flute-girl, plays his tunes, the tunes by themselves can possess people, and, because they are divine, they disclose the people who are ready for the gods and for initiation into the mysteries. The only way you differ from him is that, while you do the same thing he does, you do it using plain words without instruments. At any rate, whenever we hear anyone else talking, even a very good orator, no one takes any interest, but when someone hears you (or someone else repeating your arguments, even if he's quite a poor speaker), whether it's a woman listening, a man, or a lad, we are astounded and possessed. 215c
215d

"I myself, at any rate, gentlemen, if I wouldn't seem to be totally drunk, would tell you under oath how much I have been influenced by this man's words and even now I am still affected by them. For, when I hear them, my heart pounds and the tears flow—even more than among the Corybantes⁸⁹—from the effect of this man's words. And I see a good many others who are affected the same way. I believe that Pericles⁹⁰ and other good orators I have heard spoke well, but I was not affected like this. My soul didn't clamor or get angry about my servile state. However, I have been put in that position many times by this Marsyas here, with the effect that it seemed to me that I ought not to live the way I have. (You can't say this isn't true, Socrates.) And even now, I know in my heart that if I would open my ears, I wouldn't be able to resist, but would be affected the same way. He forces me to agree that though I have many faults I neglect my own needs and busy myself with the affairs of the Athenians. So, I forcibly stop up my ears and run away, as from the Sirens,⁹¹ so that I won't grow old just sitting there beside him. 215e
216a

"Socrates is the only human being in front of whom I have experienced what no one would believe possible for me—a sense of shame in front of someone—though I only feel shame in front of him. I know in my heart that I cannot 216b

refute him and so I ought to do what this man commands, but then I go away, a slave to the honor given by the masses. So, I desert him and escape, and whenever I see him, I am ashamed because of what we had agreed on. Many times I would gladly have seen the end of his existence among human beings, but if that ever came to pass, I well know that I would be even more distressed, so that I don't know how to deal with this man. Thus, I myself, and many others, have been affected in these sorts of ways by the flute-playing of this satyr. 216c

"And now you'll hear from me just how similar he is to those I've likened him to and how amazing the power he has is. None of you understand him, and you know it! However, I will make clear who he is, as I've begun to do. You can see that Socrates is lovingly fixated on beautiful young men, is always around them—in a daze, and furthermore that he is ignorant about everything and knows nothing. So, isn't this bearing of his like that of the Sileni? Of course it is. He's put on this external appearance just like the statue of Silenus, but when his interior is opened up, he is more filled than you would think, gentlemen and fellow imbibers, with judicious good sense. You have to realize that he doesn't care at all whether or not someone is beautiful. On the contrary, no one would believe how little regard he has for such matters and for whether one is wealthy or has anything else the multitude values as contributing to happiness. I'm telling you, he believes all those sorts of possessions to have no value at all and that we are worthless as well, and his entire life is occupied with being ironic and playing games with people. I don't know whether any of you have seen the glorious figures inside him when he is serious and opens up. I did see them once, and they seemed to me to be so divine, golden, splendid, and amazing, that, to put it briefly, whatever Socrates commands must be done. 216e 217a

"I believed he was seriously attracted to my youthful good looks, which I considered a gift from Hermes and amazing good luck, since by gratifying Socrates I would provide myself with the opportunity to hear everything he knew. (I did think my youthful good looks were quite wonderful.) So, with that in mind, on this occasion I dismissed the attendant in order to be alone with him. Before this it had not been customary for me to be alone with him without an attendant. 217b

"Now, I must tell you the whole truth, and you give me your undivided attention, Socrates. If I say anything that's false, correct me!

"Well, gentlemen, I was completely alone with him, and I thought he would talk to me right away in the way a lover talks to his darling when they are alone, and I was delighted. However, nothing at all of that sort occurred! On the contrary, he conversed with me just as he customarily did, and when we had spent the day together, he went away and left me. After that, I began inviting him to exercise with me, so that something might be accomplished that way.⁹² So, he exercised and wrestled with me many times when no one was present, and what can be said? Nothing worked for me! 217c

"Since I was achieving nothing this way, it seemed to me that I should set upon the man with a direct assault and not give up, now that I had taken on the project. However, I had to know what the situation was. So, I invited him over for dinner, just like a lover guilelessly laying snares for his darling. He didn't yield to me in this very quickly, but nevertheless in time I persuaded him. 217d
When he came the first time, he wanted to leave right after he had eaten, and that time out of shame I let him go. The next time I planned ahead, and after we dined I kept the conversation going until late at night. When he wanted to leave, I suggested that it was late and pressed him to stay. So, he lay down on the couch next to mine, where he had eaten, and no one else was sleeping in the room besides us.

"Now, I would have no trouble speaking in front of anybody thus far in my account. From here on, however, you wouldn't hear me giving it, except for the fact that, first of all, as the saying goes, wine makes for truth when the servants are absent—or when they're present, and that it also appears unjust to me, though I am praising him, to conceal Socrates' contemptuous deed. Moreover, the experience of the man who was bitten by the snake is also relevant here. They say he wouldn't tell anyone about this experience except those who had themselves been bitten, because only they could comprehend and be understanding of all the things he did or said because of the pain. Now, I have been bitten by something more painful than a snake and in the most painful place one can be bitten, in the heart or the soul or whatever it should be called. I have been struck and bitten by the arguments in his philosophy, which take hold more savagely than a viper when they seize the soul of a not untalented youth and make him do and say anything whatsoever. I am looking at Phaedrus, Agathon, Eryximachus, Pausanias, Aristodemus, Aristophanes, and all the others—and should one mention Socrates himself? Every one of you has taken part in the madness and Bacchanalian frenzy of philosophy, which is why all of you get to hear this, since you will forgive what was done then and what is being said now. But you slaves and anyone else who is uninitiated and uncivilized, cover your ears very tightly! 218a

"So, gentlemen, after the light had been put out and the slaves had gone, it seemed to me that I shouldn't be coy with him, but just state freely what I was thinking. So, I nudged him and said, 'Socrates, are you asleep?'" 218c

"Of course not," he replied.

"Then, do you know what I think?"

"What, exactly?" he said.

"You seem to me," I asserted, "to be the only person worthy of being my lover, yet you appear to be hesitant about courting me. Now, my view of the situation is this: I believe it would be quite thoughtless of me not to gratify you in this regard—and in any other, if there is anything you need from my property or that of my friends.⁹³ Nothing is of greater concern to me than my becoming the best person I can, and I think no one could be a better partner 218d

for me in this than you. I would be much more ashamed in front of people of good judgment for failing to gratify such a man as yourself, than I would be in front of the masses, who lack good judgment, for gratifying him.”

After he heard this, he spoke with his quite excessive though characteristic irony: “Alcibiades, my friend, you may not in fact be so stupid, if what you claim about me turns out to be true and there is some power in me by means of which you could become better. You must see in me a beauty that is extraordinary, and quite different from your own good looks. If, having detected this, you’re trying to partake of it with me and to offer beauty for beauty, you shouldn’t think you can obtain more from me in return for less. You’re attempting to acquire true beauty in exchange for apparent beauty, ‘gold for bronze.’⁹⁴ Well, you blessed fellow, look closer lest you fail to notice that I am not what you think. The vision of the mind begins to see keenly when that of the eyes starts to lose its edge, but you are still a long way from that.” 218e

Upon hearing this, I said, “As for myself, what I’ve said differs not at all from what I think; they’re the same. Thus, you yourself must decide what you believe would be best for you and me.” 219a

“My!” he replied, “you state that well. After considering this and other matters in the coming days we’ll do what appears to us to be best.” 219b

“After I had made my statement and heard his reply, and as it were let loose my arrows, I thought I had smitten him. So, I stood up, and not letting him say anything further, I put my own cloak over him, since it was winter. Then I lay down, getting under his own worn garment, threw my arms around this truly daimonic and amazing man, and lay there the entire night. (And you can’t say that I am lying about this, Socrates!) After I had done these things, he acted far better than I had; he disdainfully laughed at my youthful good looks, in a quite outrageous manner—and this was about something I thought was of real importance, gentlemen of the jury (for you are a jury, judging Socrates’ arrogance, and you know it!). By every god and goddess, I swear I got up after having slept with Socrates in a way that had no more significance than sleeping with a father or an older brother.” 219c

“Now, what do you think ran through my mind after that? I believed I had been dishonored, but I also admired his nature—his judiciousness and his courage. In terms of good sense and strength, I had happened upon a person of a sort I would never have expected to encounter. As a result, while I could never get angry enough to deny myself his company, I was never able to find a way to win him over either. I knew perfectly well that he was far more invulnerable to any sort of bribery than Ajax was to the sword,⁹⁵ and in the case of that which I thought would capture him all by itself, he escaped from me. So, I was destitute, enslaved by this man as no one has been by anyone else.” 219e

“All these things had happened to me earlier, and then later on we both participated in the campaign in Potidaea,⁹⁶ during which we ate our meals together. Now in the first place, in terms of dealing with hardships, he not

only outdid me, but everybody else as well! When we had to do without food because we had been cut off somewhere (the sort of thing that happens on a campaign), there was no comparison between his endurance and that of everyone else. Moreover, when there were feasts, he was the only one who really enjoyed them, and although he never wanted to drink, when he was compelled to do so he outlasted everyone—and what is most amazing of all, nobody has ever seen Socrates drunk! (Though I expect this latter claim is going to be tested in the near future!) 220a

“Furthermore, in terms of his ability to withstand the cold (and those winters were awful), he did some other astonishing things. One time there was a most terrible frost, and everyone either did not go outside or, if anyone did go out, he wrapped up in an amazing amount of clothes, encasing his feet in felts and sheepskins after putting on shoes! Yet this man ventured out in those conditions wearing only the sort of cloak he customarily wore and walked around barefooted on the snow and ice with more ease than the others in their shoes! The soldiers were suspicious that he was being condescending toward them. And these things really happened! 220b

““And yet this further deed the mighty man dared and did”⁹⁷ while on that campaign that is worth hearing. He was reflecting on something and he stood there from early morning considering it, and since no solution occurred to him, he didn’t leave, but continued to stand there seeking one. By the middle of the day, people were taking notice, and were amazed, saying to each other that Socrates had been standing there thinking about something since early morning. In the evening, some of the Ionians⁹⁸ who had finished eating finally carried their bedding outside, since it was then summer, so that they could sleep where it was cool and watch him at the same time to see if he would stand there all night. And he did stay there until dawn when the sun was coming up. Then, after he had offered a prayer to the sun, he departed. 220c

“And if you’d like to hear how he behaved in battle, it’s appropriate to render him his due in this regard as well. In that battle for which the generals awarded me the prize for valor, Socrates, and no one else among the men, actually saved me! He wouldn’t abandon me after I was wounded and rescued my armor as well as myself. I demanded at the time that the generals give the prize for valor to you, Socrates, so you can’t blame me for that situation, nor can you say that I’m lying. On the contrary, when, out of regard for my position, the generals were planning to award the prize to me, you were more eager than the generals themselves for me to get it instead of yourself. 220d

“Furthermore, gentlemen, Socrates was a sight to see when the army was retreating in flight from Delios.⁹⁹ I happened to be there on horseback, but he was on foot in hoplite’s armor. As the men were scattering in every direction, he and Laches were retreating together.¹⁰⁰ By chance, I came along, and when I saw them I immediately exhorted them to have courage and said that I would not desert them. I had a better view of Socrates that day than at Potidaea, because I 220e

221a

was on horseback and was less afraid for myself. In the first place, he carried himself with more self-confidence than Laches. Then it seemed to me that he was tramping along there just as he does around here, ‘holding his head high and glancing from side to side,’ to use your phrase, Aristophanes.¹⁰¹ He was carefully looking around at both friends and enemies, so that it was clear to everyone near and far that this man would defend himself very vigorously if anyone were to attack him. Which is why both this fellow and his companion escaped safely. For, when people behave like that in battle, they’re almost never touched. On the contrary, people chase the ones who’ve taken off in headlong flight. 221b

“Now, there are many other amazing feats one can refer to in praising Socrates. However, while with regard to some of his individual achievements one could probably say similar things about others, as a person, there is no other human being like him, neither among the ancients nor among those who exist now. That’s what merits the greatest astonishment. Even with such a man as Achilles, one could make a comparison with Brasidas¹⁰² and others, and in turn with Pericles there are Nestor and Antenor,¹⁰³ and even others. One can make comparisons of this sort for everybody else, but this man is so odd, both himself and his words, that even after searching one would never find anyone like him, either among those existing now or among the ancients, except perhaps if one were to compare him and his arguments to those I’m speaking of, not human beings, but the Sileni and Satyrs. 221c

“Furthermore (I left this out at the beginning), his arguments are most like those Sileni that can be opened up. If anyone is willing to listen to Socrates’ arguments, they at first appear to be quite ridiculous. They’re covered over on the outside with words and phrases that are like the hide of an outrageous Satyr, for he talks about donkeys and pack-asses, about blacksmiths, cobblers, and tanners, and throughout it all he appears always to be saying the same things, so that an inexperienced and ignorant person would take everything he says as a joke. However, anyone who sees his arguments opened up and gets inside them will find in the first place that they are the only arguments that make sense and then that they are the most divine, that they contain within themselves many marvelous images of virtue, and that when they are fully expanded they deal with everything that a person who wants to be good and beautiful needs to consider. 221e

“That, gentlemen, is what I offer in praise of Socrates. I also mixed in with what I told you the things I object to, the times he treated me outrageously. Moreover, it’s not just me that he has done these things to. There are also Charmides, the son of Glaucon, and Euthydemus, the son of Diocles,¹⁰⁴ and quite a few others whom this man deceived by acting more like a darling than a lover so that they adopted for themselves the role of the lover! I am speaking especially to you, Agathon, lest you be deceived by this fellow in that way. So, be careful and learn from our experiences and not, as the saying goes,¹⁰⁵ like an infant,¹⁰⁶ learn things only through your own experience.” 222a

222b

Some of the group laughed at Alcibiades' frankness in saying this, because he seemed still to be in love with Socrates. Socrates then remarked, "You seem sober to me, Alcibiades. Otherwise you wouldn't have attempted, by means of such an elegant and roundabout cover-up, to disguise your intent in saying all those things, and then tack it on at the end as though you were just adding an afterthought and hadn't said everything for the purpose of provoking a quarrel between Agathon and me. You think that I ought to love you and not anybody else, while Agathon is to be loved by you and not by a single other person. You don't fool me! Why, that Satyr and Silenus ploy of yours was patently obvious! Agathon, my friend, don't let him gain anything by this, and be on guard so that he won't be able to make you and me quarrel." 222c

Agathon then said, "Well, Socrates, you may well be telling the truth. I base that judgment on the fact that his reclining between you and me has the effect of separating us. So, he's not going to gain anything by it; on the contrary, since I want to, I am going to recline beside you."¹⁰⁷ 222d

"By all means," Socrates replied. "Recline here on the other side of me." 222e

"By Zeus!" Alcibiades exclaimed. "What I do suffer from this person! He thinks he ought to get the better of me at every turn. Well, if nothing else, you astonishing man, let Agathon recline between us." 222e

"But that's impossible!" Socrates responded. "Since you have already praised me, I in turn must praise the person on my right. Thus, if Agathon reclines on the other side of you, won't he be praising me again, rather than being praised by me? Let it be, you daimonic fellow, and don't be jealous of the lad's being praised by me, for I very much desire to laud him." 223a

"Oh, my!" said Agathon. "There's no way I'll stay where I am now, Alcibiades. On the contrary, I will most certainly move over if I'm to be praised by Socrates." 223a

"That's it," said Alcibiades, "the usual situation. With Socrates here, it's impossible for anybody else to take up with the beautiful ones. And now how easily he finds a persuasive argument, so that this beauty here will be reclining beside him." 223a

Then, while Agathon was getting up to go recline beside Socrates, a crowd of revellers suddenly came to the doors. When they discovered the doors were open because someone was going out, they trooped right in and reclined among those who were already there. Everything was in an uproar, there was no order anywhere, and everyone was forced to drink a great deal of wine. 223b

Aristodemus said that he believes Eryximachus, Phaedrus, and some others left then, but he passed out and slept for quite a while, since the nights were long at that time of year. He woke up toward morning when the roosters were crowing, and when he awakened he saw that some were sleeping and others had gone home, except for Agathon, Aristophanes, and Socrates, who were still awake and drinking from a large bowl, passing it around to the right. So, Socrates was engaging them in conversation. Aristodemus said 223c

he doesn't remember other parts of the argument, since he had missed the beginning and was also sleepy, but he said that the chief point Socrates was forcing them to accept was that the same man could know how to compose both a comedy and a tragedy and that a skillful tragedian could create comedies. They were being forced to go along, although they were getting drowsy and hardly following it. Aristophanes fell asleep first, and by the time morning came Agathon had also. 223d

Having seen them to sleep, Socrates then got up to leave, and Aristodemus followed him as usual. When Socrates arrived at the Lyceum¹⁰⁸ he washed up and then spent the rest of the day as he usually did, and after a routine day, he went home to rest in the evening.