

ONE

SOCRATES MADE BEAUTIFUL

If the starting point of the *Republic's* inquiry into justice is the construction of the just city, the starting point of the *Symposium's* inquiry into love is the portrayal of the city made beautiful through its love of the beautiful—Athens. At the beginning of the *Republic* Socrates recounts how he went down to the Piraeus with Glaucon to view a novel religious festival. Afterward Glaucon and Socrates were on their way back up to Athens when they were halted by Polemarchus and his friends and persuaded to go back down to the Piraeus. The incomplete ascent with which the *Republic* begins reflects the fact that at the peak of its argument, where the question of justice is superseded by that of the good—the “greatest thing to be learned,” as Socrates calls it—Socrates confesses to Glaucon that he is incapable of providing an account of the good, and offers instead an “ugly” image of the offspring of the good (506c–e). The *Symposium* begins as Apollodorus, a fanatical devotee of Socrates, is explaining to a nameless comrade how, just the other day, he was making his way from his home in Phaleron up to Athens when he was hailed by Glaucon who wished to question him about Agathon’s party and the erotic speeches given there. Together they ascended to Athens while Glaucon listened to the very account of the banquet that Apollodorus is now ready to repeat to another curious Athenian a few days later. At the apparent peak of the argument of the dialogue—precisely where we would expect to find an account of the good as the highest object of erotic desire—we are given instead a description of the beautiful itself as the final “thing to be learned.” In the *Republic*, however, Socrates had distinguished the good from both the just and the beautiful in his insistence that knowledge of anything else in the absence of knowledge of the good was incomplete and unprofitable and that, therefore, the good must be said to be the greatest thing to be learned (505a–506a).

Taken together, the opening actions and culminating arguments of the *Republic* and the *Symposium* illustrate the character of what Socrates called

his “second sailing.” In the course of his philosophizing, Socrates found it necessary to turn away from any attempt to comprehend the whole of things and the principle of the whole directly and instead examine the whole and the good in the speeches of men, wherein the good appears as either the just or the beautiful. The implication of the completion of the ascent at the opening of the *Symposium* that Glaucon was forced to break off at the opening of the *Republic* seems to be that the examination of the good in terms of the beautiful is somehow more revealing of the true character of the good than the examination of the just. This implication is lent some confirmation by the fact that the traditional subtitle of the *Republic* is “On the Just,” whereas that of the *Symposium* is “On the Good.”

It was, above all else, the incorporation of the poets into the life of the city—the civic status allotted to tragedy and comedy—that proved to be the first cause of Athens’ love of the beautiful. The beautiful gods of the poets became, as it were, the beautiful gods of the city of Athens; more precisely, and in contrast to conditions prevailing in such law-abiding regimes as Sparta and Crete, the presence of the poets in Athens ensured that the gods of Homer and Hesiod were not reduced there to the status of civic deities, that is, to the punitive gods who are mere props for the law and its justice. The poets, then, through preserving the beauty of the gods, ensured that they are not simply objects of fear, but the possible objects of an erotic longing that set its sights beyond the horizon of the law. The public preeminence of the poets within Athens is alluded to at the very opening of the dialogue. The events and speeches about which both Glaucon and Apollodorus’ nameless comrade wish to be informed concern the poet Agathon’s party in celebration of the victory of his tragedy in the city’s dramatic contest.

Glaucon said that he had heard about the party from a certain Phoinex, but that he had had nothing definite to say (172b). Though Glaucon believed that Apollodorus was himself present at the banquet and could therefore provide him with a clear account, Apollodorus could not possibly have been one of the guests at Agathon’s house that evening—the event took place so long ago that he and Glaucon were mere boys at the time (173a). In fact, Apollodorus has heard about it from the same person who is the source of Phoinex’s information: Aristodemus (173b). In the dissemination of the speeches regarding Agathon’s banquet, temporal distortion—an event from long ago takes on the aspect of the virtually present—has combined with obfuscation—nothing definite is known about this event—in such a way as to preserve the past, while nonetheless blotting out its true form.

Since both Glaucon and the comrade are interested in not merely gossip concerning Agathon’s banquet, but an account of the erotic speeches given there (172b, 173e), the real issue raised by the opening of the dialogue seems to be that of the distortions involved in the diffusion of Socrates’ philosophy

into the city. The *Symposium* demonstrates *ad oculos* that the primary agents of this diffusion and distortion are Socrates' own followers. Apollodorus is representative here. Though he makes available Socrates' speeches to those who stand outside his circle, at the same time he attempts to transmit his own understanding of philosophy that he has somehow derived from his acquaintance with Socrates: all human existence is misery and Socrates and his philosophy, as transcending the human-all-too-human, are alone worthwhile (173a, 173d–e). Socrates is for him a new god: a god made man. His man-god, however, lacks the power to redeem. He is a divine touchstone who shows forth the fundamental truth about human life—it is not worth living—without transforming it in the least.¹ By the end of the dialogue, the speech of Alcibiades will show that Apollodorus is far from being an isolated case.

Socrates appears to his followers as a visible god who, as such, banishes the invisible gods of the tradition. At least in the minds of his youthful devotees he has displaced the gods of the city. Since in the case of Athens, however, the gods of the city have been fused with the gods of the poets, Socrates, in the diffusion of his philosophy, has had the effect of displacing the gods of the poets, as well.

If Apollodorus' devotion to Socrates is equivalent to a pity and contempt for everyone else,² Aristodemus' attachment seems more genuine: Apollodorus says that at the time of the banquet he was the one most in love with Socrates (173b). His preservation of the erotic speeches, therefore, seems to be both a labor of love and in the service of self-knowledge. The source of Apollodorus' speeches is much closer to the reality of Socrates and his philosophy than Apollodorus could ever be. Still, in his appearance he is a simulacrum of Socrates—he is always unshod (173b)—and if he is, as the source of the speeches, most proximate to him, he is, at the same time, responsible for their separation from Socrates himself. In another sense, Apollodorus and Aristodemus represent two sides of one coin as far as the effects of the dissemination of Socrates' speeches are concerned: Apollodorus in his speech joins Socrates and his philosophy to the beauty and perfection of the gods, while Aristodemus in his deeds separates Socrates "personal idiosyncrasies"—his ugliness and defectiveness—from his philosophy. Both, therefore, represent the fragmentation of the whole man that allows philosophy to appear in an alien guise. On the evening of Agathon's party, Socrates himself seems to have succumbed to these alien appearances: contrary to his usual habit, he is "freshly bathed and sporting fancy slippers" (174a). He has, as he says, "beautified" himself, speaking of his ugliness as if it were a cloak or covering that he could discard at will. This is indeed the claim that Alcibiades makes about him in his speech. That just the opposite is the case is here made clear: it is this "beautification" that constitutes a cloak or cover.

In this state, making his way to Agathon's house, Socrates chances upon Aristodemus in the semblance of his unreconstructed self. He seizes upon this opportunity to suggest that the unseemly Aristodemus accompany him, though uninvited, to the beautiful poet's house. By these means, Socrates puts his mind to reversing the effects of the diffusion of his philosophy among the Athenians. He insists that his ugliness—his knowledge of ignorance and perplexity—is not an ironical concealment of his wisdom. He is not a god.³ That he reattaches himself to the ugly appearance he has been forced to discard in decking himself out for the poet's party, and does so despite the fact that the poet himself has left Aristodemus off the guest list, seems to suggest that not only the loose lips of the acolyte, but the contrivances of the poet's art, as well, can only operate to effect this separation. Yet the fact that Socrates and Aristodemus go together to the poet's house and that they have been paired by Plato in his work leads us to conclude that a certain employment of the poetic art provides for putting back together what the diffusion of philosophy into the city pulls apart. If Plato portrays a "Socrates become beautiful and young,"⁴ he must nevertheless somehow preserve in this portrayal Socrates' knowledge of ignorance and perplexity as the center of his philosophizing. In the terms of the topic of the banquet, Plato, through his Socrates, must both eulogize eros and deny the poet's claims that eros is the "most beautiful of gods."⁵

Agathon's celebration is a two-day affair, but Socrates would not be drawn into the festivities of the first day on account of his antipathy to the crowd. The passion he experiences in the face of the multitude, however, is not Apollodorian contempt, but fear (174a). Agathon obviously does not share Socrates' fear of the crowd (194b). The powers of his art provide him with a shield against the dangers ingredient in association with the multitude. Is the same fear that kept Socrates away from the first day of Agathon's celebrations, encouraging him to attend the second? Does Socrates wish to persuade Agathon to put his powers in the service of Socrates and his philosophy as a defense against the multitude? This would explain why he has taken this unprecedented trouble over his toilet. He wishes to worm his way into Agathon's good graces by sharing on this evening the concern that lies closest to Agathon's heart: decorum. This assumption, however, is shaken in the face of the casual shamelessness with which Socrates invites his shabby friend to Agathon's "black-tie affair." Would one come closer to the truth, then, if one were to conceive of his "going beautiful to the beautiful" as a species of mockery of Agathon's pretensions: the clown aping the ballerina?⁶ If so it would be an expression of Socrates' hubris. Agathon believes this to be the motive force behind the first words Socrates speaks to him upon his tardy arrival (175e). Through the action at the opening of the *Symposium*, then, Plato appears to root Socrates' insistence on the inseparability of his philosophy from his defectiveness and humanity in shamelessness and hubris:

if philosophy is to reappropriate what is most its own in the face of the distortions involved in its diffusion, it must violate conventional propriety. It cannot be afraid of flaunting and vaunting its ugliness.

Having secured Aristodemus' complicity in his scheme to foist an uninvited guest upon his host, Socrates bids him follow so that they may change and corrupt the proverb according to which the good go to the feasts of the good uninvited (174b). The corruption seems to lie in the fact that Agathon is good in name alone: what all call good and reward with the highest honors is in fact merely the beautiful—the good and the beautiful are only conventionally the same. Socrates' reappropriation of the private truth of his philosophy in the face of its public diffusion and fragmentation entails, in the first instance, distinguishing the beautiful and the good. Here is the root of all Socrates' improprieties. Putting himself back together requires breaking up this specious unity. As we will see, and as Aristodemus is about to suggest,⁷ this separation has as its necessary corollary the demonstration of the goodness of the ugliness or defectiveness of Socrates' philosophy. Separating the beautiful and the good and attaching the latter to the ugly, however, necessarily results in the demolition of the gods of the poets.

The first half of Plato's introduction to the speeches of the *Symposium* then seems primarily concerned with the relation of Socrates to these gods. Socrates displaces the gods of the poets both insofar as he appears in the eyes of his followers as a novel divinity and insofar as he attempts to recover his humanity and with it the truth of his philosophy in the wake of this distortion. Given that Athenian piety has been profoundly affected by the teachings of the poets regarding the gods, one must conclude that Socrates' presence within Athens cannot help having profound and far-reaching consequences for Athenian piety. Whether Socrates allows himself to be taken for a god or insists upon his humanity, the gods of the Athenians are under threat.

The *Symposium* nearly ends with the "advent" of Alcibiades and is set one year prior to the embarkation of the Sicilian expedition of which Alcibiades was the chief architect and instigator.⁸ Moreover, the dialogue seems to be Plato's representation of the truth behind the accusation against Alcibiades that robbed him of the command of that expedition and sent him into exile—namely, that Alcibiades had mocked the Eleusinian mysteries at a banquet the year before the mutilation of the Hermae and might, therefore, plausibly be associated with that latter crime. Plato clears Alcibiades of this charge while showing that his friend Socrates was involved in what the Athenians could only construe as still grosser impiety. Behind the Athenians' suspicion of Alcibiades, Plato suggests, was his association with Socrates: in the eyes of the multitude, any man who was as intimate with Socrates as was Alcibiades could never be an adherent to traditional piety.⁹ The conflict between Alcibiades and Athens, therefore, is a foreground conflict—behind it

lies the conflict between Socrates and Athens. That the story of the banquet is now, years after the fact, current gossip and that Apollodorus is willing without hesitation to tell the tale to all comers indicates that the conflict between Athens and Alcibiades has been resolved. The dialogue must take place, therefore, after Alcibiades has returned from exile and reconciled himself with the citizens of his native city.¹⁰ That this reconciliation will prove to be temporary points to the irresolvable character of the tension between Socrates and Athens in regard to the question of piety and to the limits, therefore, of Athenian enlightenment. If those limits were first displayed in the events surrounding the Sicilian expedition, they appeared finally and most vividly in the trial and death of Socrates.

The first half of Plato's introduction to the speeches of the *Symposium* then is concerned primarily with Socrates' relation to the gods of the poets; its second half highlights Socrates' relation to these poets themselves. The transition between the first and second halves, however, is made by means of a reference to a non-Athenian poet who was said to have been, like Socrates, the brunt of the Athenians' prosecutorial wrath: Homer.¹¹

According to Socrates, the corruption of the proverb for which he and Aristodemus will be responsible is as nothing next to the outrage (*hubris*) that Homer had already committed upon it, for he made a bad man go uninvited to the feast of the good (174b–c).¹² Socrates puts himself in the same camp as the father of all poets and suggests that, despite the weight of tradition that claims Homer as the foundation for all conventional Greek notions of virtue, both he and Socrates are in fact "criminals" insofar as they corrupt and violate conventional wisdom. He and Socrates belong together, according to Socrates, as standing outside the city in a way that the tragic and comic poets, who have their official place within the political realm, do not. Homer's wisdom cannot be the same as that of the tragic and comic poets and must either be coextensive or compatible with Socrates' own.

If Socrates' corruption reveals the truth that conventional wisdom conceals, his friend Homer's "hubris" must perform a similar exposé. In fact, in the incidents from the *Iliad* to which Socrates refers, Homer, like Socrates, makes a sharp distinction between what is conventionally honored and what is genuinely good. In *Book Two* Menelaus goes to his brother Agamemnon's feast without an invitation immediately after Agamemnon through his own actions has completely undermined his attempt to lead the Achaean war effort.¹³ If it is true that Agamemnon is one of the stronger warriors at Troy, he nonetheless lacks all strength of mind and prudence. He enjoys preeminence by convention alone.¹⁴ By contrast, in *Book Seventeen*, Agamemnon's brother is shown to be, if a lesser fighter, a more intelligent man and his reticence in battle is a sign of this intelligence: he does not consider retreat in the face of overwhelming odds, but rather dying needlessly in a vain display of thoughtless courage to be shameful.¹⁵ Menelaus implicitly

distinguishes between the noble or beautiful and the good and decides for the superiority of the latter. When confronted with insurmountable opposition, Menelaus retreats in good order and seeks an ally to come to his aid.¹⁶ In this he resembles Socrates who, at the close of Alcibiades' speech, will be shown retreating in good order (221a–b), and, here at the beginning of the *Symposium*, seeks allies in Homer and Aristodemus for what turns out to be his advance against the tragic and comic poets.

Socrates now seals this alliance by quoting a line from the *Iliad* that casts himself in the role of Diomedes and Aristodemus in the role of Odysseus immediately before undertaking their famous night raid against the Trojan camp (174d). Far from making his way to Agathon's banquet in order to forge an alliance with his host, it would seem, Socrates is conducting espionage and plotting a sneak attack against him. The offensive that has forced Socrates onto a war footing, however, can only be that of Aristophanes' *Clouds*.¹⁷ Socrates and Aristodemus going behind enemy lines to attack the poets on their own terrain then, though overtly appearing as a contest with Agathon, involves primarily a counterattack against Aristophanes. It would seem that what is attracting Socrates to the banquet has little to do with the tragic poet and his victory and everything to do with the promise of the comic poet's presence there (213c). Socrates will eagerly seize upon Eryximachus' proposal to make eros the topic of the evening's conversation because it is precisely this topic about which he and Aristophanes claim to have particular knowledge (177e, 189c–d). It is precisely on this terrain that a contest between Aristophanes' poetic wisdom and Socrates' philosophy must be waged.

If Socrates is to confront the wisdom of Aristophanes, therefore, it would seem to be necessary to guarantee somehow that the praise of eros be made the topic of conversation at Agathon's dinner. It is, of course, ultimately Plato who has scripted the banquet such that the evening's entertainment will consist of speeches about eros. We suspect, therefore, that the triple entente of poet, philosopher, and lover can be reduced to a pair insofar as Plato fills the roles of both Homer and Aristodemus. That Homer is the only writer precedent to Plato who can be said to rival his poetic capacity is clear; that Aristodemus also points to Plato is perhaps less obvious. Like Plato, however, Aristodemus is the "silent source" for the account of Agathon's banquet: without being the narrator of the speeches he is responsible for all that the narrator has to say. The "two going together" who stand against the preeminence of the tragic and comic poets are Socrates and Plato. It would seem that only through the art of writing of Plato can the wisdom of the Athenian poets be shown to be of second rank in relation to Socrates' erotics.

As Socrates makes his way to Agathon's banquet in the company of Aristodemus, he suddenly halts and "turns his mind to himself" (174d),

compelling Aristodemus to go on without him. Socrates delays and turns away from his contest with the poets in order to reflect in solitude upon himself and what is most his own. For Socrates, his contest with the poets is not, as it is at least for Agathon who basks in the glow of his newly won victory, primarily a matter of besting his opponents. It is a means to self-knowledge. The need to demonstrate the goodness of philosophy, despite its artlessness, powerlessness, and lack of defense before the city, could hardly be a question of humbling the poets. The issue at stake is the accurate assessment of the nature and worth of the very activity in which Socrates is now engaged—thinking. Can a human being find his chief good and greatest pleasure in thought and the source of thinking—perplexity—or does the poverty and ignorance at the heart of all thinking rather uncover the worthlessness and wretchedness of the human state in comparison to the beauty of divine wisdom? Agathon is the living embodiment of the apparent goodness of the beauty of such wisdom. Moreover, he links that beauty tightly to the Athenian context. If the demonstration of the goodness of philosophy involves going to war against the wisdom of the poets, this equally entails going to war against the wisdom of Athens. Making clear the goodness of philosophy requires putting the philosopher in mortal peril.

When Aristodemus, unseemly and unshod, arrives at his door, Agathon dispels the awkwardness of the situation through the beauty of his speech: he annuls Socrates' disruption of the beautiful order he has established for the evening by pretending that not Aristodemus' presence, but his absence would constitute a breach of protocol (174e). He wishes to exercise a similar magic in regard to Socrates' delay and sends his slave-boy to persuade Socrates to cease to be "out of place" (*atopon*). That Socrates, thanks in part to Aristodemus' insistence, persists in his eccentric behavior indicates that he is a surd in any overarching order even or especially that of the beautiful (175a–b).

This may appear surprising given that, as Agathon shows, the beautiful order associated with Athens at her peak is understood by the Athenians themselves to be the ground of the most unfettered liberty. Agathon exhorts his slaves to prepare dinner as if they themselves were hosting the party and plied their art, as Agathon plies his, not under the weight of necessity and compulsion, but for the sake of sweet praise alone (175b). The noble is to be the motive for all action, even that of the lowest slave. Beautiful speech is a sufficient cause of the establishment of a beautiful order in which necessity has been transcended or suppressed and perfect liberty left to flourish unencumbered by restraint. Should not the freedom afforded by such a context provide a perfect refuge for Socrates and his thinking?¹⁸

The Agathonian or Athenian dream of an order in which compulsion dissolves in the light of the beautiful, however, requires the extermination of the hiddenness and privacy that is the hallmark of all thinking. If every

activity is to be undertaken in the interest of noble praise, then every activity must enjoy the publicity required as a precondition for such praise—it is not simply the just, but also the beautiful that ultimately points in the direction of the total communism of Socrates' City in Speech. Socrates, therefore, cannot help but cast a long shadow under the brilliant glare of the beautiful.

Socrates' necessary recalcitrance acts to compel Agathon to recognize the necessity of the just: when Socrates arrives and responds to Agathon's charming greeting with what appears to be a barely concealed insult, Agathon finally loses his composure and declares: "You are hubristic Socrates. A little later we shall go to trial, you and I, about our wisdom with Dionysus as a judge" (175d–e). If it was the poets who instilled in the Athenians their devotion to the beautiful that made possible the liberty for which democratic Athens was justly famous, it was also a poet who set the stage for the trial of Socrates by demonstrating publicly that the essentially private nature of thinking cannot help seeping into the public realm and in doing so show itself as incompatible with the public order of the city.¹⁹

The distinction between the public wisdom of the poet and the private nature of Socrates' thought and his erotics is the real issue at stake in what Agathon understands to be Socrates' crudely ironical and insulting "praise" of his wisdom (175d–e). Though Agathon's concern with praise leads him to detect, not entirely without warrant, blame and ridicule in Socrates' words, Socrates is above all remarking upon an aspect of the poet's art that is the foundation of its power. Upon Socrates' arrival, Agathon invites him to lay down next to him so that, through their touching, Agathon may share in the "piece of wisdom" that he presumes Socrates has apprehended. Socrates expands Agathon's conceit to a full-blown metaphor and denies that the transmission of wisdom is something similar to water passing from one vessel to another through a thread. In this way he mocks what he takes to be Agathon's suggestion that wisdom can be sexually transmitted—that it could simply overflow from an active source into a passive receptacle—but at the same time implies that his own philosophizing is as sequestered, intimate, and selective as erotic coupling. By contrast, Agathon's wisdom is a grossly public affair—it has "flashed out" before more than thirty thousand Greeks—and its reception requires only the silent acquiescence of the spectator—his audience simply opened their ears and let Agathon's speeches pour in (175e).

Yet it is just this public character of the poet's wisdom that seems to lend it the advantage: poetry's ability to lead the multitude, its psychogogic power through which it compels the ordinary man to laugh and cry and, at a maximum, molds the character of a nation, seems to allow so perfectly for the combination of knowledge and rule that those over whom poetry exercises its sway fail even to detect their subordination. This power certainly lends Agathon his confidence in his imagined trial with Socrates: in the

political setting of a courtroom presided over by the publicly acknowledged god of the poets, Socrates' private art of speaking could not help but appear as "worthless" (*phaulos*) and "disputable as a dream" (175e). The beautiful in its publicity seems to enjoy a virtue that the good itself lacks.²⁰

Be that as it may, once justice and the law have invaded and disrupted the beautiful order established by Agathon, it becomes plausible that the man who will turn out to represent the law and legislation among the evening's speakers will take over the direction of the banquet's proceedings. Pausanias will prove, however, to represent not so much the law as the logical consequences of Athens' devotion to the beautiful in relation to the law: Pausanias' speech will prove to be a "lawful" proposal for the overturning of the law.

At the moment, Pausanias conspires with the doctor Eryximachus to overturn the ancestral or conventional order established for Greek banquets and institute a wholly new regime: instead of the usual drinking and singing of hymns, a series of speeches in praise of the god Eros is to be the core of the evening's entertainments (176a–177d). According to Eryximachus, this proposal owes its origin to Phaedrus (177a), his friend and fellow student of the sophists. What Pausanias, Phaedrus, and Eryximachus propose to do is to take Eros from out of the shadows and obscurity that the poets have left him in (177c), in order to give him public honors as a "big and important god" (177b). They continue with the elimination of the private ingredient in the Athenian conflation of the beautiful and the good and reveal, by implication, what would be required to fulfill this ambition. It is Eryximachus who proves to represent this ambition at its highest pitch and so it is only fitting that he, with his presumption to scientific wisdom, now becomes the guide in setting the course for the rest of the evening.

If eros is to be made an item of public intercourse, something more than mere beautiful speeches is required: one would have to possess a ruling science endowed with the power to master and transform human nature. This is implied first in Eryximachus' expulsion of the flute-girl in the interest of allowing erotic intercourse (albeit in speech) between men and youths (all citizens of the city) to prevail (176e). Heterosexual eros—which always, even in the case of the prostitute, implies the possibility of the generation of offspring and so points to the family and the establishment of the private realm—is to be abolished in favor of nongenerative homoerotic unions. But the elimination of women and the family means the elimination of the sacred—its rooting out from public and political life. This is precisely the subterranean theme of Eryximachus' next proposal. His recommendation that drinking and drunkenness be suppressed (176c–d) indicates his support for the extirpation of what Plato's Athenian stranger insists is the truth of "drunkenness itself"—namely, hope and fear, the passions of the soul that lie at the root of all piety.²¹

To reengineer human beings such that hope and fear would cease to be operative within human affairs, however, would require that one possess a psychology of sufficient depth and comprehensiveness and a psychiatry of sufficient power to effect the result. One would need a medical science of soul that would include both a diagnostic and a therapeutic art.²² That Eryximachus lacks either is made clear by his attempt to divide the guests at the banquet into classes in the light of his scientific understanding of drunkenness: he offers not a psychological, but a strictly physiological account of each individual's capacity in this regard and is forced, as he himself admits, to leave Socrates "out of account" (176c). Not only is a physiology, in its reduction of soul to body, unable to account for the experiences of soul, but it is unable to account for the reality of mind.²³ No physiology can explain how Socrates can drink everyone under the table while remaining perfectly lucid in his thought. Pre-Socratic materialism, and the cosmology elaborated on its basis, finds itself, on the one hand, unable to provide an analysis of the origin of the false opinions about the first things it so deplors (the nearly universal belief that the gods exist and are the highest beings), and, on the other hand, impotent when called to reflect upon and account for its own thinking about the whole and its first principles. It can give no account of the source of its own putatively comprehensive account. Socrates, as representing philosophical self-reflection at its peak (philosophy as necessarily including and based upon self-knowledge), is just as much a surd in the beautiful order of the pre-Socratic cosmos as he is in the beautiful order of Athens' regime.

Lacking self-knowledge, Eryximachus, whose physiological understanding of drunkenness leads him to declare it to be merely a "hard thing" for human beings that ought on all occasions to be eschewed (176d), must himself fall prey to the drunkenness he condemns: like Pausanias before him, but more thoroughly and unreservedly, he will entertain in his speech the most unbounded and groundless hopes in regard to the possibilities for enlightenment on the political plane. He knows nothing of the impossibilities involved in the political rule of wisdom that Socrates demonstrates so abundantly in the arguments of the *Republic*. Given the self-undermining character of Eryximachus' materialist presuppositions then, Socrates can now, without further ado, take over the direction of the conduct of the banquet (177d). In doing so, he dispenses with Eryximachus' democratic procedure—a procedure that indicated Eryximachus' confidence in the perfect compatibility of thoroughgoing political enlightenment and Athenian democracy. Socrates performs a coup d'état when he cancels the vote that was about to be held as to whether or not speeches on eros were to be put at the top of the evening's agenda. If we discount Socrates' appeal to Agathon and Pausanias—whom he includes simply on account of their love affair—it is really only Aristophanes whom he takes as his co-conspirator in this coup (177e).

Only Socrates and Aristophanes can make a serious claim to possess knowledge of soul and knowledge of the human things and, therefore, self-knowledge. It was Aristophanes' claim in the *Clouds*, however, that Socrates lacked such knowledge.²⁴ Socrates has now come to dispute that claim and test his wisdom against that of Aristophanes. That the question of eros is the key to knowledge of soul and knowledge of the human things both Socrates and Aristophanes agree. Socrates' psychology, however, employs two principles in its analysis of soul: eros and *thumos*. According to the arguments of the *Symposium*, Aristophanes' knowledge of soul proves defective in its failure to discriminate with sufficient clarity between these two principles. In demonstrating this failure, Plato and his Socrates take Homer as their ally: as in the case of the *Republic* and its account of the just, Homer's understanding of *thumos* will prove indispensable to the arguments of the *Symposium* and its account of love.