

Socrates' Praise and Blame of Eros

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Boston College
The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
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SOCRATES' PRAISE AND BLAME OF EROS

a dissertation

by

DAVID LEVY

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ABSTRACT
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It is only in “erotic matters” that Plato’s Socrates is wise, or so he claims at least on several occasions, and since his Socrates makes this claim, it is necessary for Plato’s readers to investigate the content of Socrates’ wisdom about eros. This dissertation undertakes such an investigation. Plato does not, however, make Socrates’ view of eros easy to grasp. So diverse are Socrates’ treatments of eros in different dialogues and even within the same dialogue that doubt may arise as to whether he has a consistent view of eros; Socrates subjects eros to relentless criticism throughout the *Republic* and his first speech in the *Phaedrus*, and then offers eros his highest praise in his second speech in the *Phaedrus* and a somewhat lesser praise in the *Symposium*. This dissertation takes the question of why Socrates treats eros in such divergent ways as its guiding thread and offers an account of the ambiguity in eros’ character that renders it both blameworthy and praiseworthy in Socrates’ estimation.

The investigation is primarily of eros in its ordinary sense of romantic love for another human being, for Socrates’ most extensive discussions of eros, those of the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, are primarily about romantic love. Furthermore, as this investigation makes clear, despite his references to other kinds of eros, Socrates distinguishes a precise meaning of eros, according to which eros is always love of another human being. Socrates’ view of romantic love is then assessed through studies of the *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, and *Symposium*. These studies present a unified Socratic understanding of eros; despite their apparent differences, Socrates’ treatment of eros in each dialogue confirms and supplements that of the others, each providing further insight into Socrates’ complete view.

In the *Republic*, Socrates’ opposition to eros, as displayed in both his discussion of the communism of the family in book five and his account of the tyrannic soul in book

nine, is traced to irrational religious beliefs to which he suggests eros is connected. Socrates then explains this connection by presenting romantic love as a source of such beliefs in the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*. Because eros is such a source, this dissertation argues that philosophy is incompatible with eros in its precise sense, as Socrates subtly indicates even within his laudatory treatments of eros in the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*. Thus, as a source of irrational beliefs, eros is blameworthy. Yet eros is also praiseworthy. Despite his indication that the philosopher would be free of eros in the precise sense, Socrates also argues that the experience of eros can be of great benefit in the education of a potential philosopher. Precisely as a source of irrational religious belief, the erotic experience includes a greater awareness of the longing for immortality and hence the concern with mortality that Socrates believes is characteristic of human beings, and by bringing lovers to a greater awareness of this concern, eros provides a first step towards the self-knowledge characteristic of the philosophic life.

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Introduction: Eros and Plato's Politics

It is not immediately apparent that Plato's understanding of eros, eros in the ordinary sense of romantic love between human beings, is of great relevance to political science. As Ludwig's *Eros and Polis* has convincingly shown, ancient Greek political thinkers, including Plato, also used the term eros in a broader sense, a sense according to which eros may be for one's city or imperial conquest, and such eros is clearly of political importance (2002).¹ But Plato's most extensive treatments of eros, those of his *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, are focused, at least primarily, on romantic love; political concerns are given relatively little attention. If we wish to study Plato's most sustained treatments of eros, it seems we must begin with eros in its ordinary sense.

Since Socrates' treatments of eros ascend in each case from love of other human beings to philosophy, we may hope to gain some clarity about his understanding of philosophy by following his treatments of ordinary eros, and in philosophy we find a topic which Plato at least presents as being of fundamental political importance, insofar as his discussion of philosopher kings is meant to clarify the nature of political life (cf. *Republic* 473c11-e5).² However, the politics of the philosopher king are highly

¹ See Ludwig (2002) especially pages 121-169, 319-380.

² Cf. Strauss (1964, 138). All references to Plato are to Burnet's edition (1901-5). All translations are my own, although I have frequently consulted Pangle's translation of the *Laws* (1988), Bloom's translation of the *Republic* (1968), Nichols' translation of the *Phaedrus* (1998), and Bendardete's (1993) and Lamb's (2001) translations of the *Symposium*. In the introduction, all unspecified references to Plato are to the *Laws*; in the first chapter, all unspecified references to Plato are to the *Republic* (hereafter also referred to as *Rep.*); in chapter two, they are to the *Phaedrus* (hereafter *Phdr.*); in chapter three to the *Symposium* (hereafter *Symp.*). All italics in translations from the Greek are my emphasis, and they are meant to bring out the point I wish to emphasize rather than to indicate the tone of the Greek.

paradoxical, and therefore their relevance to actual political life too cannot be readily ascertained.

Yet the notorious restraints imposed on eros, in both Plato's *Republic* and his *Laws*, suggest that in Plato's view, at any rate, eros is of political importance. Furthermore, it seems probable that the contemporary belief that the study of eros is not of fundamental importance to political science stems, at least in part, from the belief that eros is a private matter with which the political community, its laws and statesmen, ought not to meddle. Seen from this contemporary perspective, Plato's suggestion that the regime should regulate and guide erotic life appears as merely one more consequence of his illiberal view of good political life. In other words, Plato's illiberal treatment of eros seems at first sight to stem from his understanding of politics in general, according to which a healthy regime must regulate all areas of life (cf. *Laws* 631d2-632d1, 780a1-7), and not from his understanding of eros in particular. Still, Plato's suggestions for healthy political life allegedly stem from his understanding of human nature, and therefore his suggestion that the city should regulate all areas of life seems to be based on his assessment of what political arrangements would be most conducive to human happiness and would in this sense accord with human nature (631b3-6). Then, since Plato regards human nature as erotic (*Symp.* 206c1-4), it remains possible that Plato's illiberal view of healthy political life stems in part from his assessment of our erotic nature.

The studies below of Socrates' treatment of eros in the *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, and *Symposium* offer considerable evidence in support of the above suggestion: Plato's understanding of eros provides some basis for the view that a regime should and to some

extent necessarily will direct its citizens towards a view of virtue and the gods, for the sake of which some regulation of eros would be justified. To make this thesis seem more credible, however, it is helpful to begin with a brief discussion of the treatment of eros in Plato's *Laws*. In the *Laws*, we are confronted not with the paradoxical politics of the philosopher king, which, as Plato makes explicit in this work, are not suited to human nature and hence not possible for human beings, but with Plato's "second best city" (739a-e), and thus we are more likely to find in the *Laws* the practical political recommendations that stem from Plato's view of eros.

Near the outset of the *Laws*, the Athenian Stranger instructs his two interlocutors in the task of the lawgiver, making clear that eros will be subject to legal regulation. The lawgiver aims to secure happiness for the citizens, and this happiness depends on the lawgiver's providing for the good things, human and divine (631b3-7). The possession of the human goods, health, strength, beauty, and wealth is to be assured through the attainment of the divine goods or the virtues: prudence, moderation, justice, and courage (631b7-d2, cf. 630d9-631a4). The aim of the city is thus its citizens' happiness. Virtue is presented as the key to the attainment of happiness, and the attainment of virtue, the Athenian next suggests, requires the thorough regulation of the citizens' lives. Careful watch must be kept over marriage, the birth and rearing of children, and erotic longings (631d6-632a2). Illiberal laws are justified by the pursuit of the citizens' virtue and happiness.

We must note that the Athenian does not think the thorough regulation of the citizens' lives that he demands need be enforced by laws with definite penalties. Rather,

he suggests enforcement by the apportionment of honor and dishonor through the praise and blame contained in the laws themselves (631e1-2, 632a2, cf. 632b1-c1). That is, the city's laws should indicate the praiseworthy and blameworthy practices for all the citizens throughout all of life. When we turn to the Athenian's full articulation of the marriage law that he recommends, we find that it contains a mixture: a fine is imposed on anyone who refuses to marry by the appointed age, and an exhortation is included which is to encourage citizens to choose spouses not with an aim to increasing their wealth or merely private pleasure but with a view to their spouses' character, the good of the city, and the good of their children (772d5-774c2). Praise and blame will be used to encourage the right matches; force will not be used as the attempt to compel citizens to choose certain spouses would only arouse resentment and make the law appear ridiculous (773c3-8).

The law cannot retain the respect the Athenian demands for it, if it directly compels citizens to satisfy their eros in the manner most precisely suited to the city's needs, but it also cannot leave eros entirely unregulated. The exhortation added to the marriage law helps us see why eros needs regulation. In marrying, one begins to form a new household to replace that of one's parents, and the Athenian has carefully limited both the number of households and the range of wealth permitted to them, forbidding poverty and excessive wealth, and teaching the citizens that the land, which is their principle source of wealth, has been allotted to each for his caretaking by divine sanction (737e1-3, 740a-745b). These provisions serve not merely to discourage faction and encourage friendship among the citizens (743c5-6, 744d3-5), for they also promote the

piety (740a6-b1, b8-c1, 741b5-6), justice (742e4-743c4), moderation (743e6-744a3), and, by making them adhere to the rule of an intelligent legislator (742c6-d2), prudence of the citizens; i.e., they promote virtue. The marriage law then aims to help maintain this delicate order by exhorting citizens to choose a spouse whose marriage will, by balancing the characters and wealth of the citizens, promote the virtue of the children and maintain the distribution of wealth in the city within moderate limits. The Athenian's regulations regarding children, both those demanding that excess male children be given up for adoption to households lacking a male son and otherwise regulating the size of the population (740c2-741a4), and those describing the city's mandatory educational system (through books seven and eight), likewise promote the maintenance of the city's delicate arrangement.

We can see then in the marriage laws that because erotic relations affect the character of the citizens, both that of the husbands and wives and that of their children, the Athenian's concern for the virtue of the citizens requires some regulation of eros. But we have not yet seen that Plato's understanding of eros contributes in any way to his view that the city must be concerned with virtue; the concern with virtue seems simply to demand eros' limitation. Recalling that the Athenian seeks virtue for the city on the grounds that it provides for the citizens' happiness, we note that we have not seen any evidence that such happiness as virtue offers is not outweighed by the irritation caused by the restraint of eros.

If, however, we turn back from the Athenian's discussion of the full marriage law in book six to his first discussion of marriage laws in book four, we can begin to see a

way in which the city's strict legal code not only restrains but also supports eros, in helping lovers obtain what their eros leads them to desire. In book four, the Athenian offers as an example of a "prelude," or an explanation that is to be attached to each law,³ a discussion of the purpose of marriage. This discussion does not contain an exhortation to seek a spouse with regard to the city's needs, but rather explains why men should want to marry. According to this prelude, everyone by nature desires immortality; the desire not to lie nameless after death is such a desire; and the human species attains immortality by generating children (721b7-c6). The suggestion is that through marriage men may have a share of immortality by leaving a child behind them who lives on after their death. By noting that men, unlike women, can only be confident in having progeny to live on after their death, if they are in the first place sure that the child their mate tells them is their own is in fact their own, i.e., if they can trust their mate, we can understand why this law and indeed the full marriage law articulated in book six are addressed only to men (cf. 721b1-2, 6-7, 772d5-e2, 774a5 with 785b2-4).⁴ For marriage, by binding husband and wife together before the city and the gods, would greatly increase the husband's trust in his wife and therefore his confidence about his offspring in a city where there is strict obedience to the laws (cf. 835c-842a).⁵

The Athenian's discussion of human life prior to the emergence of cities with written legal codes in book three, where he stresses primitive man's virtue or natural

³ See England for a discussion of the general significance of preludes (1921, 1-3). See Pangle on the precise reasons given in this context for preludes and the reason the marriage law is the example given (1988, 445-449, 472-473).

⁴ See Stauffer (2005, 63-65, 70).

⁵ See Stauffer (2005, 64).

innocence (678a-680e),⁶ could lead one to think that marriages, or at least the fidelity of a mate, would be secure without the city keeping guard. But what the Athenian more quietly intimates about that pre-political condition suggests that men might not find their mates so reliable under such conditions. The Athenian likens primitive life to that among Homer's Cyclops, "where each asserts his right over children and wives, and they do not care for one another," and when one of his interlocutors suggests that Homer's description is one of savagery, the Athenian confirms this view (680b1-d5, cf. *Odyssey* XI. 112-115).⁷ In such savage conditions men may take their women by force (cf. 680e6-681a4), and neither women taken by force nor rival men who care nothing about one another are likely to permit much assurance of spousal fidelity.⁸ In the city whose legislation the Athenian is describing, on the other hand, marital fidelity is supported by reverence for the law and the gods who support the law, and concern for the praise presented in the law (cf. 841c4-5).

Finally, the Athenian indicates that the protection of marriage is at least among the most important purposes of the city's piety. This is suggested in the following way. After his discussion of marriage laws the Athenian turns to a description of the household of the married couple (776b5), and in the midst of this description, while calling attention to the correctness of the order in which he proceeds (778a9-10, b4-6), he offers a discussion of housing plans. In this discussion, he speaks, as Strauss points out, not primarily of private homes, but "above all of temples, most extensively, of the city

⁶ Cf. Strauss (1975, 39-40); Pangle (1988, 423-426).

⁷ Cf. Strauss (1975, 40-41); Pangle (1988, 427-428).

⁸ See Stauffer (2005, 71-73).

walls,” and the private homes are treated only insofar as they may be arranged so as to serve as a wall (1975, 96; 778a-779d). The Athenian then concludes the passage by confirming that he has been speaking of matters pertaining to marriage (779d5-6). The walls discussed in this passage presumably pertain to marriages insofar as they protect the married couples, and given this context, we are then entitled to suspect that the Athenian here intends to suggest that the temples too are being built in support of marriage.⁹ The watchful eyes of the gods supplement those of the city in guarding against marital infidelity. Thus, the Athenian later even suggests that only a god (835c1-2), or the belief in the impiety of marital infidelity (838a9-c7), would suffice to prevent promiscuity among the citizens.

We can see then that while eros may be restrained by the city’s laws in some respects, other aspects of human eros may be served by the laws. The laws, by supporting marriage, permit stronger attachments between husbands and wives and fathers and children than is possible under other conditions (cf. 839b1). Lovers may then be expected not only to chafe under the strict laws the Athenian would impose upon them, but also to find their erotic concern for their descendants better fulfilled in a community bound by such laws. And, since the relationship between eros and such legal codes as would restrain it is not as straightforward as it might at first seem, we may then wonder if there are not more and deeper ways in which the eros of the citizens leads to their support of the laws.¹⁰ The subsequent studies of eros will show that it does support

⁹ See Stauffer (2005, 82-83); cf. Strauss (1975, 96); Pangle (1988, 471-472).

¹⁰ In this regard, consider also Stauffer’s argument that the common meals for women that the Athenian proposes are impossible in part due to the concern of fathers for their wives and children (2005, 63-65, 71-74, 82-87, 100-104, 116-119, 177, 184-188, 192-197, 206-208).

the laws, and it does so, must fundamentally, in a way the Athenian only hints at in the *Laws*. That is, the Athenian hints that eros in particular encourages the citizens' piety. He does this not only by charging those who abstain from marriage with impiety in addition to recommending that they be fined (721c6-7), but also by asserting that for the legislator what is first "according to nature" is the marriage law (720e10-11),¹¹ shortly after suggesting that the legislator should begin his instruction of the citizens with an exhortation to religious worship (715e4-717b5).¹² For if eros somehow provides encouragement for the citizens' piety, it can lay a claim to being a natural starting point for worship. We shall have to wait for the studies below of Plato's more sustained treatments of eros in his *Republic*, *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* in order to confirm and clarify the connection between eros and religious belief suggested here.

Before we turn to these studies, however, it is helpful to bring out why, in Plato's view, the citizens' piety should be of great concern to the lawgiver and also why this concern with the citizens' piety requires a strict legal code more generally. By so doing, we can begin to see how important eros, as a natural foundation for piety, may be to Plato's understanding of political life. The importance of piety is brought out most clearly and succinctly by the Athenian's discussion of corrupt regimes in book three, where he describes the decay of ancient Athens into a state of excessive freedom (693e5-7, 698b-701c). By comparing the decayed city to its prior, healthy state, we see what the gain of freedom or the loss of strict legal restraint implies. With this change in view, we may then see more clearly a fundamental, not to say by itself decisive, advantage of the

¹¹ For the translation of 720e11, see England (1921, 463).

¹² See Strauss (1975, 63).

piety that the Athenian would seek to foster among citizens and of the kind of illiberal regime which he believes would foster it.

Before its decay, the Athenian tells us, the Athenians were law-abiding out of sense of piety, which he characterizes here as awe. Athens was ruled, he emphasizes, by a “despotic mistress, Awe,” because of which its citizens were willingly enslaved to the law (698b5-6). In this respect, the Athenian notes, ancient Athens was ruled in the manner he generally recommends to cities (699c2-6), for it is by awe, which he also calls “divine fear” (671d2-3), that the laws come to be taken as having the divine support that the Athenian demands (cf. 671d-672d, 713e1-714a6).¹³ Along with the Athenians’ awe came hope; when the Athenians faced an overwhelming Persian invasion, their awe-inspiring way of life permitted them hope, hope in their own resources and hope for divine assistance, which helped them stick together and thereby prevail (699b6-d2). Finally, the Athenian notes that the city before its corruption had well regulated music, many forms of which were devoted to the gods (700a7-b7).

The decay of Athens then began with a decay of music. Whereas music had been subject to the qualified judgment of the educated, the poets themselves came to be the judges, despite their incompetence (700c1-d5). The poets defended their usurpation by denying the existence of any correct standard and by appealing to the pleasure that their music gave to each (700e1-4). This appeal, however, led the many to appoint their own taste as the judge, believing that they themselves were competent (700e5-6). Having taken this step, and therefore having come to consider themselves adequate judges of

¹³ See Pangle (1988, 402).

music, the many then drew the further conclusion that “everyone is wise in everything” (701a6), a plausible conclusion if one supposes the many’s competence in music, which pertains to the highest matters, the gods. Along with holding each to be wise, the many became fearless and therefore lacked also that divine fear or awe which had ruled and which implied recognizing an authority higher than themselves (701a6-7). Finally, lacking awe, the people came to reject paternal and familial authority, and ultimately to disregard oaths and any other concern for the gods (701b5-c4). The excessive freedom of Athens led to the loss of awe before the laws and then all piety.

The Athenian thus brings out through a contrast of the older Athens with the newer, free Athens that the pious awe characteristic of the older community was inseparable from its illiberal laws.¹⁴ And this awe serves not merely to promote friendliness within the city or to encourage it in times of war (699c1-d2), for awe also permits hope for help from the gods, and if we turn again to the Athenian’s first discussion of the marriage law, we can see how important this hope may be at any time. The Athenian suggests there that human beings pursue immortality through their progeny, but by referring to this as “a desire” for immortality and saying that everyone by nature desires immortality “in every way” he suggests that there are other ways in which one may pursue immortality (721b6-c1). And by making clear that the desire is for personal immortality and indicating that only the species is truly preserved through one’s progeny (721c1-6), the Athenian allows that there may be better ways of pursuing

¹⁴ Which is not to say that the complete absence of freedom is desirable: the discussion of the corrupt Persian regime, which “in a way suffered the same thing” as the Athenian (699e1-2), seems to show that awe is also not possible in a regime with too little freedom (cf. 697d6-698a3).

immortality, ways of pursuing one's own immortality.¹⁵ Then, when we consider that the hopes furnished by awe may provide some measure of confidence not only in divine protection for one's family (729c5-8, 931eff.), but also, for those unable to follow proofs about the immortality of the soul (cf. 892dff.), in the possibility of attaining personal immortality through divine assistance (671d-672d, 790d2-791b1, 907b5-7, 944d5-7),¹⁶ we can see that humans may be able to feel far more hope of fulfilling the natural wish for immortality in a community whose strict legal observance commands awe. Furthermore, in providing such support for its citizens' hope for immortality, we may see something of how the kind of city which Plato seems to prefer, for all practical purposes, would provide for the happiness of its citizens, which is its ultimate end. Finally, if eros is, as we have suggested, a natural source of the citizens' piety, we can see now more fully why Plato would have thought the understanding of eros of vital importance to politics.

From this brief consideration of the *Laws*, I wish to have offered some support for my suggestion that Plato's understanding of healthy political life stems in part from his understanding of the erotic nature of human beings. If this suggestion is true, and I believe the following studies of Plato's treatment of eros in the *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, and *Symposium* confirm that it is, then the interpretation of Plato's view of politics requires the interpretation of his treatments of eros. Furthermore, by this brief discussion of Plato's *Laws*, I wish also to have provided, in a preliminary way, some sense of what

¹⁵ See Strauss (1975, 63-64); Pangle (1988, 448); Stauffer (2005; 66-68).

¹⁶ See Stauffer's discussion of Poseidon's providing Kainis with immortality (2005, 156-158).

may be at stake for political science in Plato's understanding of eros: the possibility that Plato's view of eros led him to think not only that a healthy community would seek, by means of praise and blame, to restrain eros in some respects, but also that his understanding of our erotic nature is one reason that he regarded a relatively strict, pious, illiberal community as the kind of community most in accord with human nature. If man is by nature erotic, he is not naturally an isolated individual, but finds his fulfillment best in or through attachment to other human beings, and I wish to have suggested by the interpretation of the *Laws* above and to confirm and clarify by the studies of eros below, that this erotic attachment to other human beings is, in Plato's view, related in important ways to the awe before the laws and the gods characteristic of the virtuous illiberal community described in the *Laws*. In studying Plato's treatments of eros, we may hope to prepare ourselves ultimately to consider whether anything may be said on behalf of Plato's view of healthy political life, the illiberality of which surely disturbs us today. That is, we may hope that the interpretation of Plato's view of eros will help us better determine whether the freedom we take for granted today, which is also or especially freedom from illiberal views, represents in all respects a genuine advance, or whether, along with such great goods as it provides, it does not also mask a genuine need, a need rooted in our nature, a need which may be better met by a community whose horizon is firmly delimited by sacred awe, and a need which we may address by first recovering a more complete awareness of it through the study of Plato's thought.

Thus the following study takes up the question of Plato's understanding of eros. We do not approach each dialogue asking only the question or questions that this

preliminary discussion of the *Laws* has occasioned, for to do so would incline us to overlook important details which do not appear immediately relevant. We seek to understand eros as Plato sought to teach us about it through his dialogues. Then, however, we must face the difficulty that there may not be a unified Platonic teaching about eros. Plato's Socrates seems to treat eros differently in different dialogues, or, in the case of the *Phaedrus*, within the same dialogue; in the *Republic*, eros is harshly blamed as it is again in Socrates' first speech in the *Phaedrus*, but it is given his highest praise in his second speech there, the palinode, and a somewhat more qualified praise in his *Symposium* speech, if his concluding remarks in each case are to be trusted (cf. *Phdr.* 257a3-4 with *Symp.* 212c1-3). Thus, each dialogue in the following study is treated separately, using a minimum of reference to the other dialogues in the interpretation of each, so as to assess whether Plato's dialogues do present a coherent teaching about eros.

The guiding thread for the study is found in the puzzle we have noted, that Socrates gives eros both great blame and high praise, and in the indication given in the *Phaedrus* that Socrates is only able to blame and then praise eros alternately because of something in eros' character which renders it disputable (*Phdr.* 263b-d). We seek to determine whether understanding this ambiguous aspect of eros' character permits us to grasp the unity of Plato's most prominent treatments of eros. There follow chapters on Socrates' two most extensive discussions of eros, those of the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, which are primarily laudatory of eros, and a chapter on Socrates' treatment of eros in the *Republic*, where, in his discussion of the city in speech and his discussion of the worst way of life, that of the tyrannic soul, Socrates seems inclined to view eros in the harshest

light. The treatment of the *Republic* thus makes a helpful counterweight to that of the *Symposium* and especially the *Phaedrus*, where the rhetorical aspect of Socrates' discussions could obscure some of the harsher considerations about eros.

To anticipate the conclusion, there does seem to be a unified understanding of eros at work in the three dialogues studied, an understanding which confirms what we have suggested on the basis of the *Laws*. Eros is blamed in the *Republic* for the religious beliefs to which it gives rise, for these religious beliefs tend to be irrational and oppose philosophic rule. This tendency of eros to lead lovers towards irrational religious belief is then acknowledged in the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, and yet eros is praised in these dialogues for nearly this very reason; eros, by the same means that it inclines us towards irrational religious belief, also begins to awaken us to self-knowledge and may therefore be of great help in leading us to what Plato and his Socrates regard as the highest human possibility: the philosophic life. Thus, in addition to helping clarify the tremendous political implications which in Plato's view derive from our erotic nature, the following study also sheds some light on Plato's view of philosophy. It is only by understanding Plato's view of this best way of life, or the life most fulfilling of human nature, that we can approach a more complete assessment of the way and degree to which Plato believed life in such cities as that whose founding is described in the *Laws* could be truly natural.

Chapter One: The *Republic's* Blame of Eros

In the *Republic*, Socrates treats eros quite harshly. This treatment is most prominent in book five's sexual legislation, where Socrates' proposals entail the destruction of the private family, and in book nine's treatment of the tyrannic soul, where the soul's greatest corruption is traced to eros. Accordingly, we divide our study of Socrates' treatment of eros in the *Republic* into two parts, the first centered around book five and the second around book nine. The interpretation of book five's attack on the private family helps clarify book nine's treatment of the tyrannic soul, and the interpretation of book nine in turn provides some confirmation of our treatment of book five.

Part One: On the Purpose of Socrates' Sexual Legislation in Book Five

Our interest in the *Republic's* treatment of eros is first aroused not by its brief explicit treatments of that subject, but by its shocking disregard of eros or the thorough subordination of the claims of eros to the demands of the city, i.e., the city being founded by Socrates along with Glaucon and Adeimantus, in book five. The *Republic's* communism of women and children, if not also its endorsement of sexual equality within the guardian class, probably shocks us today as it did Glaucon, and, we infer, Greeks in general, when Socrates first pronounced it (457b-d, 452b-c). And this shock is doubtless due, at least in part, to the way the proposed legislation undermines ordinary erotic

relationships.¹ Our task is to discern for what purpose Socrates will so subordinate eros and why that purpose requires this subordination.

This task is immediately complicated, however, by the multitude of justifications Socrates gives for the proposed legislation, and these justifications seem to be in some tension with one another and with the earlier education of the guardians. To indicate this simply and preliminarily, the equality of women is justified by Socrates' claim that the women of the guardian class will in this way be made best and that nothing is better for the city than having the best possible men and women (456e), but, according to the defense of communism of women and children, the best thing for the city is unity which communism aids by removing distinctions between the guardians (462a-b, 464a). The principle of the first argument, the promotion of excellence, runs counter to that of the second, sharing as much as possible in common, for excellence will only belong to some (cf. 456d5-6).² Indeed, to the extent that the communism makes the guardians a stronger class, it will further increase their superiority to the other classes, thus threatening the city's unity. Finally, the communism is allegedly to make the guardians as much as possible like parts of a single human body (462c-d), but this aim seems at odds with the earlier education's aim of self-sufficiency and independence from others (387d11-e1), to say nothing of the concern with love of the beautiful with which the music education concludes (403c).

¹ If evidence is needed for this common sense observation that communism of women and children as well as coed naked gymnastics undermine ordinary erotic attachment, see *Phaedrus* 250e-251a, 254a-255a, 256d, and *Symposium* 192d-e, 206c-207a, 208e. See also Ludwig (2007, 207-208).

² See Nendza (1988, 345, 347-348).

Noting the discrepancies in Socrates' arguments and noting the comical atmosphere he cultivates in the midst of offering his proposals, one may, as many have, draw the conclusion that Socrates is not making these proposals in complete seriousness.³ Considering the difficulties attending the argument for communism in particular—both the difficulties attending its justification and those which render its implementation, at best, a most unlikely occurrence (473c-e)—some have argued that Socrates' radical reform of traditional family life is carried out not because Socrates thinks it best but in order to show, in one way or another, the tension between political life, with its demand for unity among the citizens, and eros.⁴ Such a reading supposes that the justification for communism would be the city's demand for unity, as Socrates claims, and that by showing us the ridiculousness and impossibility of the consequence of complete adherence to this demand, Socrates loosens its hold on us. To the extent that cities may dream of attaining such unity and freedom from faction, Socrates' argument may well have this effect, but the very fact that Socrates suggests that cities have ends other than unity in the very context in which he is discussing communism suggests that perfect unity may not be the primary end of cities. In this case, Socrates' reason for proposing communism may extend beyond illuminating the tension between the city's demand for unity and the demands of eros.

Indeed, book five makes a new beginning in the *Republic's* founding of a city which had seemed complete in book four (450a8, 427c6-d1), and this new beginning's

³ For examples, see Bloom (1968, 380-381); Sallis (1975, 371-378); see especially Saxonhouse (1978).

⁴ For examples, see Sallis (1975, 378); Saxonhouse (1976, 211); Nichols (1984, 252, 254). Compare Ludwig's account of the tension arguments, which he only partially follows (2007, 203-217).

most fundamental addition to the original is the philosopher king, who enters the dialogue as a mere means to the realization of the regime, but who appears ultimately to be the highest end of the city, for whose sake the prior legislation is necessary (473b-c; 497bf., 502b, 520a-b, 540b5-6, 543d1).⁵ Thus we turn to the details of Socrates' proposals, seeking in particular to discover whether these reforms are not in fact somehow necessary for philosophic rule. If the sexual legislation should turn out to be necessary for the acceptance of philosophic rule, then it would seem that the tension is not so much between eros and politics as between ordinary eros and philosophy, or, more cautiously, ordinary eros and the highly paradoxical politics of the philosopher king.⁶

Equality

It is not immediately obvious why Socrates introduces equality amongst the guardians as his first proposal in book five. He had been asked only to clarify the character of his earlier proposal that the women and the children of the guardians would be held in common (449c, 423e). His earlier suggestion referred explicitly only to the

⁵ See Bruell (1994), especially pgs. 266 n.5, 271, 274. The following chapter and indeed the whole dissertation is much indebted to his argument there about the structure of the *Republic*, as well as the many conversations I have had with the author about the matter; I hope here to develop and verify the link suggested on pg. 274 between the sexual legislation and philosophy. I also have made much use in this chapter of unpublished notes from a class on *The Republic* taught in 1988 at the University of Chicago by David Bolotin; it is hard to discover anything in my interpretation of the *Republic* which he did not in some way anticipate, which is of course not to say he would agree with my interpretations.

⁶ That Socrates already has philosophic rule in mind at the beginning and throughout his discussion of the sexual legislation is indicated both by his reflection on the limits pertaining to the sharing of thoughts which he makes immediately before entering into the legislation (450d-451b), and his suggested rationalizations of the city's otherwise irrational views of the ridiculous, noble, and sacred which he makes throughout the discussion (452d6-7,e1; 457b4-5; 458e3-4); these rationalizations, by supplanting traditional views with those based on benefit, reflect the philosophic view of the superiority of the good to the noble (505a-b; cf. 504d4-5, 493c1-6).

maximal possible sharing of “women, marriage, and child-procreation” (423e7), and this was introduced as a means of preserving the education of the guardians, whom Socrates then explicitly limited to males (*andres*) (423e-424a, cf. 395d5-6). When, however, Socrates first proposes equality, it is after having added a concern with the “use” (*chreia*) of women to the concern with their possession (451c), and he will now propose to use women for the same things as men (451d-e).

In fact, this is not the first addition Socrates makes to his task, for he earlier replaced his listeners’ request for a description of the communism with the more pointed questions of its possibility and its goodness (449c-450c).⁷ And we therefore wonder if it is not the addition of these questions that leads Socrates to take up the question of women’s equality. It seems unlikely, however, that the goodness of communism is improved by the equality within the guardian class, especially since, as we have seen, the arguments for the goodness of these institutions seem to be in some tension with one another. Nor would adding the equality of women in the military make Socrates’ reforms seem better to his listeners, although arousing a comic atmosphere in making this argument and overcoming some of his listeners’ shame may help soften the shock of the communism. Furthermore, we should consider that the goodness of the proposed communism would surely have been in question regardless of Socrates’ making this explicit at the beginning of book five, because the discussion of each institution of the city concerned its goodness as it was instituted (cf. 420b7-8). Thus, the question of possibility is Socrates’ main addition to the request of his interlocutors, and perhaps then

⁷ See Strauss (1964, 116).

it is the newly aroused concern with the possibility of communism that leads Socrates to argue for equality. This suggestion is given further support, as I shall discuss subsequently, when Socrates says the law of communism “follows” the law of equality (457c7), since this suggests that equality may be a useful or necessary precursor to the communism. It surely suggests the two laws are linked more deeply than by the fact that they are both concerned with women.

The argument for equality is quite brief. No concern for women’s rights is apparent, as Glaucon’s ready acceptance of women in the guardian class seems motivated simply by the idea that this would be a better use of the women for the city; the two activities which women would presumably otherwise take up, child bearing and rearing, are simply discarded without discussion (451d-e). This is similar to the final argument in defense of equality. There, Socrates argues that women educated as guardians will be better (for the city) than the other women, although no alternative tasks for women are suggested for comparison, as shoemakers were opposed to the male guardians (456b-457a). What is clearly missing from this justification of equality in terms of the usefulness of the greater number of guardians which it would permit is an argument for the suitability of guardianship to female nature. It is this consideration which Socrates seems to defend in the course of his argument for the possibility of equality. That is, Socrates presents his argument for the possibility of equality as an argument that equality accords with woman’s nature (452e-453b, 456b-c). Socrates first mentions female nature as that which would determine the limits or range of possibilities for any woman, and thus, determining if equality is natural in this sense would simply demonstrate equality’s

possibility (452e6-453a3). Yet Socrates turns, without explanation, to another meaning of nature, according to which what is natural is what most fulfills or is best for a certain kind of being; Socrates reminds us that the entire regime is to have been founded in accordance with nature (453b4-5, cf. 433a4-6), as none of the present regimes have been (cf. 452a7-8). Thus we see that many things have come into being, at least among human institutions, that are not, in this sense, natural, and it is the naturalness of equality in this second sense that Socrates proceeds to defend.

Socrates' apparent conflation of these two meanings of nature thus jeopardizes the rigor of his defense of equality in a way which will become clearer in the discussion of communism. In the meanwhile, we should note a way in which the naturalness of equality in the second sense, as what is best or fulfilling for women, implies the possibility of equality in a higher or more rigorous sense, provided that what seems to be most fitting to a given nature is not opposed by other aspects of its nature. What accords with nature would be most stable and hence able to remain in existence, because it would not be opposed by any natural inclinations. Thus the regime founded in accordance with nature would not be driven to reform or overturn its institutions as other regimes are driven to overturn institutions that are not natural (424a, 433a-b, cf. 422e-423a, 426e, 501e). Furthermore, while unnatural regimes can and do come into existence, there cannot be perfect adherence to their laws and orders due to human nature's opposition to them. To the extent that we identify a regime with its authoritative laws (cf. 338e1-3, 551a12), and the authority of the laws implies obedience to them, a regime with unnatural

laws is never fully possible. Thus a regime's possible existence is assured by its naturalness.⁸

Now, while Socrates does give the appearance of arguing for the naturalness of equality, his use of nature as a standard seems primarily to highlight what his argument lacks.⁹ The argument Socrates gives is not for the natural fitness of women to any particular task nor the fitness of some women for the task of guardianship, although this is subsequently asserted without argument (456a), but rather, Socrates argues that women are generally inferior at all tasks (455c-d). In such a case, it seems doubtful that there would be enough exceptional women sufficiently fit for the tasks of the guardians, especially since these require sufficient bodily strength for war, and bodily strength is the one quality Socrates and Glaucon consistently note that women lack (451e1-2, 455e1-2, 456a10-11, 457a9-10). Yet, despite singling out war as a questionable task for woman's nature (453a3-4), and despite mentioning in this context the need for adequate bodily strength if a nature is to be suited to a task (455b9), Socrates offers no argument that woman's nature or her bodily strength is suited to war.

The inappropriateness of putting women in battle is brought out again in book five's later treatment of war. There, Socrates refers to men (*andras*) and then fathers

⁸ Although there is still another use of nature in the *Republic* according to which what is natural would never come into being (501b1-4, cf. 473a1-2, and cf. 597a4-9 with c1-d3). This use refers to various ideals which exist "by nature", but which transcend humanity's capacity for implementation. Such ideals seem to be objects of human aspiration, but even their goodness is quietly called into question by Socrates' remarks concerning possibility and goodness in his discussion of communism (458a1-b3), as I discuss below. Socrates only introduces such ideals after conspicuously failing to defend the naturalness of communism; he only turns to these after his regime has failed the more rigorous standard of possibility (cf. 472d-473b).

⁹ See Saxonhouse (1976, 199-200); (1978, 888 n.2); Nendza (1988, 339-340).

(*pateres*) without mentioning women or mothers leading their children in battle (467c).¹⁰ Glaucon, apparently taking Socrates' hint, concludes the discussion of war by suggesting that women might not participate in battle, and if they did, they would be in the rear (471d). Socrates lets this go without correction.¹¹ Socrates' remarks which refer only to the participation of men in warfare immediately follow Glaucon's question as to whether bringing all the guardians' children to battle does not constitute too great a risk, as the city could be unable to recover if all its children were lost (467b2-4). Glaucon's concern, however, could well apply also to bringing the women to war, for far fewer men than women need survive to populate another generation.¹² Perhaps then Socrates' omission of women at war is not due only to concern about the strength of women but also to concern about their usefulness as child-bearers.

Yet it is this use of women which Socrates most conspicuously overlooks as he knowingly offers an inadequate argument for female equality within the guardian class. The basic point of Socrates' argument is the inferiority of women in *all* tasks, and this of course includes the bearing and rearing of children, which Socrates had earlier proposed as the alternative to female equality (451d6-8). Whatever the case with rearing may be, women certainly excel all men at child-bearing,¹³ and thus the task most suited to and indicative of the distinctively female nature would seem to be the perfection of bearing

¹⁰ See also 460b1-3, where Socrates speaks of rewarding the young who excel in war with women but not men.

¹¹ See Saxonhouse (1976, 195, 207).

¹² See Strauss (1964, 118).

¹³ See Saxonhouse (1976, 199).

children.¹⁴ Socrates' raising the question of woman's nature and his subsequent argument which simply denies any natural female excellence, thus, when thought through, call attention to Socrates' dismissal, without argument, of the female role as child-bearer, and to his unwillingness to make or leave this as women's principle occupation. The argument for the naturalness of equality thus calls our attention to at least one effect of the equality which is of particular importance to the communism of children: the denial that a guardian woman's place may be in the home with the children.

Equality's enforcement of the separation of woman from child is not its only connection with the subsequent communism. When Socrates begins his description of the communist laws, he refers back to the laws for equality, arguing that the mixing of the sexes in all activities, especially naked exercise, and their living and dwelling in common, will inevitably lead to sexual relations cropping-up among them as determined by "erotic necessities" (458c6-d7, cf. 452a11-b1).¹⁵ Furthermore, these sexual relations are not likely to be highly monogamous, as is indicated by Socrates' implication that they would be "irregular" without the city's intervention (458d8-e1). Equality thus takes women away from their children and puts them among the men, often without any clothes on. Looking ahead to the impermanence of the marriages and the childlessness required by the city's communism (459e-460d), the equality of women appears as a means by which to weaken the attachment of women to their children and to specific men, thus also weakening the attachment of men to their women and, since promiscuity

¹⁴ See *Laws* 785b and 789eff for evidence that Plato could think the role of bearing children may be quite time consuming for women.

¹⁵ See Bruell (1994, 274).

would cause obscurity regarding who is the child of whom, to their children, which conditions are necessary for the acceptance of communism by the guardians. It is in this way that the law of communism seems to “follow” that of equality (457c7). This does not mean communism is simply a consequence of equality, for additional laws are needed to enforce the communism, but it does imply that equality prepares the way by weakening the family.

Communism

Socrates introduces his discussion of the proposed communism of women and children with a ruse that attracts attention to the question of its goodness and thus allows Socrates to avoid the question of possibility. That is, immediately after Glaucon expresses doubt regarding both the goodness and the possibility of such communism, Socrates suggests that its goodness is undisputed and that he has only the question of possibility to answer (457d4-9). Quite naturally, this provokes Glaucon to object, and Socrates is compelled to answer the question of communism’s goodness (457e1-4). That Socrates’ intent was in fact to draw Glaucon’s attention to the question of goodness and distract him from that of possibility is confirmed by the sequel, where Socrates seeks and obtains permission to consider the character and goodness of the communism while postponing the question of its possibility (458a-b). Socrates then follows this order of inquiry, reversing the order suggested in his initial statement of the questions, and the order he followed in the discussion of equality (450c8-9, 456c, cf. 452e4-5). To

understand the significance of Socrates' avoidance of the question of possibility for the discussion of communism as a whole, we must follow this theme somewhat further.

Socrates characterizes his request to put off the question of possibility as that of an idle man seeking to avoid weariness in deliberating about the possibility of what he desires, and Socrates admits that this procedure will make one still idler (458a1-b1). Presumably this procedure makes one more idle by replacing the straining (and enjoyment) of seeking to fulfill a desire with that of fantasizing about its fulfillment (458a). One was already idle before this, however, and Socrates apparently takes avoidance of the question of possibility as evidence of idleness. In Socrates' view, actively pursuing something is inseparable from consideration of that thing's possibility; a thing's goodness cannot be properly considered without ascertaining its possibility. Thus Socrates affirms the correctness of the original order of questions. Socrates' insistence on the appropriateness of this order, even if he will lead his audience away from it here, is intelligible if a thing's goodness depends on its possibility. This consideration in turn makes sense when one bears in mind that that the goodness in question is goodness of something for someone or some group (cf. 505a-b, d5-e1), for if the attainment of a supposed good thing is impossible then it cannot be good for that person. Socrates' subsequent account of the goodness of communism is thus rendered suspect by Socrates' own admission.

The inadequacy of Socrates' procedure is further suggested by comparing Socrates' eventual treatment of communism's possibility with his treatment of equality's possibility, for Socrates replaces the question of possibility in terms of naturalness with

the lower and less rigorous question of whether and how it can come into being at all or even be merely approximated (466d6-8, 473a-b). It is true that at the conclusion of his discussion of communism Socrates asserts its accordance with nature (466d2-4), but if we examine his very next statement, we see that this is precisely what needs to be proven. For there, Socrates asks if the communist arrangements just described are also possible among humans as they are among lower animals (466d6-8), and, while this question explicitly asks only whether communism can come into being, the juxtaposition of what is possible among lower animals with a question about what is possible among humans cannot but raise the question of communism's suitability to human nature (466d6-8).¹⁶ Finally, Socrates' raising of this question here accords with the utter lack of consideration of human nature within the discussion of communism. Socrates' procedure thus renders communism's goodness suspect, in particular, with respect to its suitability to human nature.

Socrates could have argued for communism among the guardians with a more or less identical argument to that which he used to defend equality, for there he argued that nothing was better for the city than producing the best possible men and women (456e), and here he could have argued that the eugenics program, which communism facilitates, would further this end (cf. 459d7-e3). Instead, Socrates makes another argument, one which is in some tension with the earlier argument's concern for excellence,¹⁷ and this argument especially brings out the difficulty communism poses for human nature.

¹⁶ Cf. Sallis (1975, 373-374)

¹⁷ This tension between the city's concern for excellence and its concern with unity also appears in Socrates' use of a community of pleasure and pain as opposed to a shared view of virtue or nobility in his discussion of the unity provided by communism: the standards for the city concerned with unity must be lowered (462b4-6; cf. 403c4-7). See Nendza (1988, 345).

Socrates argues that communism of women and children will help provide the greatest good to the city by making it most like a single human body which is unified in its awareness of pleasure and pain in any of its parts (464b1-3, 462c10-d5). Yet while there seems to be no distinction between our feeling pain in our finger and our awareness that this pain and this finger are our own, the citizens need a community in which they must first think of others as their own and only then can they try to feel their pain (463e3-464a2). By likening the city to an individual human body, Socrates provokes the question of whether humans are the kind of beings whose selves can be so dissolved as to permit the thorough incorporation of each as a mere part of the city.

Socrates subsequent avoidance of the question of the naturalness of communism and his ultimate replacement of that question with the lower standard of whether the regime could be merely approximated, strongly suggests that Socrates is aware of its unnaturalness (471c-e; 473a-b).¹⁸ This suggestion is then further supported by Socrates' remarks shortly after his argument for communism's goodness for the city. First, Socrates admits that the human body can never cease to be private or one's own (464d8-9), but one may easily wonder whether concern over the body can be limited to prevent seeking private possession of goods, women, and children.¹⁹ Socrates then tacitly suggests there can be no such limitation of concerns: he admits spirited fights will in fact occur with such frequency that their possibility will encourage all to remain fit for fighting, and Socrates only seeks to dissipate the spiritedness that encourages fighting as safely as possible (464e3-465a3). Finally, even fathers will be beaten on occasion, and

¹⁸ See Strauss (1964, 118)

¹⁹ See Strauss (1964, 127).

such occasions will be unlikely only in part because of the shame one feels before his “fathers”, for fear of punishment is also needed (465a8-b3).

That the unity Socrates praises is unnatural and that Socrates is aware of this is confirmed by an addition he makes to the argument for communism, namely, that the communism is also good for the individual guardians (458b5-6, 465df.). Consideration of the individual’s good was absent from the treatment of equality and the questions Socrates raised at the beginning of book five, but Socrates raises the question here, and he even draws attention to the fact that this is the first time he raises the question by reminding us that Adeimantus’ concern about the happiness of the individual guardians from the beginning of book four had hitherto gone unanswered (465e4-466a6). After his argument that communism will unite the city such that all share equally in one another’s goods (464d3-5), one would expect that the individual benefits of communism would not be worth mentioning, but it is precisely here that Socrates first brings them up, thus implying the failure of communism to transform the individuals into mere parts of a greater whole. Socrates even seems to highlight this failure by his praise of the guardian’s happiness, which he suggests surpasses that of the Olympic victors (465d2-3), for he thereby compares them favorably to a class whose members’ success sharply distinguishes them from all others.

Thus Socrates seems aware of the unnaturalness of the end by which he justifies communism.²⁰ Because the unity for which communism is allegedly sought is not

²⁰ The above argument has indicated in particular the unnaturalness of the unity Socrates proposes to justify communism, and it only casts doubt on the naturalness of the communism itself insofar as communism requires one to give up the private (which it does to a large but not exhaustive extent: private honors remain). I infer the unnaturalness of the communism in particular due to Socrates’ failure to argue for its

natural, it cannot be fully achieved, even if a tyrant could go some way towards attaining it. Furthermore, Socrates does not even seem to have designed it well to achieve as much unity as possible. Socrates' admission that spirited rivalry will be present among the guardians reminds us that Socrates requires rewards, including sex, to be given to the better guardians, thus creating divisions from which faction may grow (465a1-3, 460b1-5). More fundamentally, however, one may doubt whether humans can be as attached to a crowd consisting of people who are family members only by law as each of them can be to a small family within which one develops close relationships.²¹ In particular, the law prohibits any woman or child from being someone's own and thus from being cared for as one's own. Each guardian is required to regard all the others in one way or another as a family member (463c5-7), but the law does not provide for the actions between lovers and family members that are, at least ordinarily, conducive to the formation of unifying bonds of kinship. Socrates indicates that the mere names of kinship will not suffice to unify the city and adds laws which require good conduct towards "parents" and punish bad conduct (463c8-e2), but no law can be made to require fathers and mothers to nurture their children and thereby engender respect for themselves, since child-rearing is strictly regulated by independent officers (460b7-d5). In fact, freedom from the trouble of rearing and financially supporting children is one noted benefit of communism for the guardians (465c2-3). Finally, the regime forbids continuous cohabitation and mutual support between man and wife. Perhaps then it is because of these short-comings in the

naturalness. As I shall explain below, Socrates' admission in book ten that decent men will not be able to refrain from mourning for lost loved ones as opposed to his suggestion in book three that they would be unable to tolerate such mourning and would even laugh at it also implies the impossibility of communism (603e7-9, 388a1-2,d2-3).

²¹ See Ludwig (2007, 214-215).

law that Socrates, after attaining Glaucon's agreement that merely mouthing the names of kinship would be ridiculous, concludes by saying that when anyone is doing well or badly all will "utter together" (*sumphonesousin*) the "saying" (*rhema*) that they are themselves doing well or badly, and does not say that all will feel the same way (463e3-5).

Socrates therefore appears to be aware of both the unnaturalness of his proposed communism and the fact that the communism proposed would do more to weaken the attachments of each of the guardians to some others than it would to attach each of them to all the others. If we turn now, finally, to the details of the communism as Socrates describes them, it will appear that this weakening of the guardians' erotic attachments to their spouses and their attachments to the most common product of eros, their children, is in fact Socrates' primary purpose. Since Socrates claims to outline the communism for the sake of his eugenics program, it could seem that this is his aim (459c-e), but Socrates does not even mention the eugenics program in his defense of communism's goodness. And the discussion of the nuptial number at the beginning of book eight then confirms that Socrates does not take the eugenics program seriously.²²

Socrates begins his description of communism after first obtaining Glaucon's agreement that humans, like the lower animals, should be bred from only the best who are also in their prime (459a-b). Given the needs of breeding, Socrates then notes that (unlike those breeding lower animals), the rulers will require elaborate deceptions to facilitate the breeding (459c8-d2). Socrates then describes the city's communism, and he

²²See Ludwig (2007, 216); Sallis (1975, 377).

divides his discussion in two parts: the lies concerning breeding the best with the best (459d7-460d8), and the laws concerning breeding only those in their prime (460d8-461e6).²³ Socrates suggests the reason for this division when he asserts that the breeding of the best with the best must be kept secret to avoid factions (459e1-3), whereas the official ages in which reproduction is permitted are not kept secret (461a3-5). It makes sense that the older could more easily accept their inferiority for reproductive purposes both because age is less deniable and more obviously inevitable than is badness, and because the old are compensated with freedom to have intercourse with whomever they wish, other than their ancestors and progeny (461b9-c3).

If the avoidance of all faction is the true purpose of the deceptions in the first part of the discussion, Socrates' proposals seem questionable. For, immediately after proposing the use of "subtle lots" to conceal the preference for the best in breeding and thereby permit the others to blame chance for their loss (460a8-9), Socrates proposes giving more frequent intercourse with women, along with other prizes, to the most excellent guardians (460b1-5). By rewarding excellence with sex, it seems that Socrates will manifestly create distinctions among the guardians from which factions may arise, yet he refers to these rewards as a "pretext" (*prophaseos*) for producing the most children from these men. The lots may serve to hide from the lesser men that sex is reserved

²³ Socrates indicates this division by beginning the first part of his discussion by referring only to breeding the best with the best (not mentioning those in their prime) and by marking its end with "let us go through the next point" (*to ephexes dielthomen*), after which he turns to the discussion of breeding ages (459d7-9, 460d8). It could seem that Socrates digresses from this outline by discussing the guardians' child care center within the first part (460b7-d5), which specifies more details of the child-rearing than are required by Socrates' introduction to this section, where he only refers to rearing the children of the best and not those of the worst (459d9-10), but he introduces both the beginning of the discussion of the child-care center and that part of the discussion following the discussion of rearing some children and not others by connecting them to the preceding with the expression "*oukoun kai*" (460b7, c8). I will indicate the relevance of the child-rearing discussion to the first part of the discussion as a whole below.

primarily for the best, but the rewards utterly fail in this. They serve as a pretext only for the eugenics program, hiding from all that the best are rewarded because only they are to be the fathers. Socrates apparently hopes that the bitterness that may arise amongst those who are rewarded less often will be meliorated by their belief that those receiving the rewards did in fact merit them and that merit must be rewarded. This implies, however, that the importance of rewarding merit is clearer to the guardians than the importance of the eugenics program, thus casting doubt on the strength of the arguments by which Socrates so easily persuaded Glaucon of the need for it (cf. 459b10-c1). If, then, the eugenics program is not of such obvious value, we are compelled to look for other reasons for Socrates' elaborate deceptions.

Those who never or rarely have sex will know that far fewer of the children are their own, so Socrates' "pretext" does little to prevent less affection for the young on the part of slighted men or to meliorate any strong desire on their part to have children; it seems rather to serve to obscure the strong connection between the excellent and their young. The excellent will not know that they are granted sex in order to produce more children and thus they will be less inclined to see the children as the offspring of their own particular virtue; furthermore, presuming the guardians discover that some of the children are not kept alive (460c3-5), those who are rewarded more frequently for excellence will not be able to deduce that their children are likely to be the survivors. That this detachment of parents from children is, in fact, Socrates' primary concern in this section is then further indicated by his abrupt change of topic. For, after his mention of using rewards as a pretext, he turns to the manner in which children will be separated

from parents, and raised apart from them, or, if they come from bad stock or are otherwise deformed, presumably killed (460b7-c5). The parents, as mentioned, will not be notified of their child's fate. Socrates' adds that while mothers will be used for milk, "every contrivance" will be used to prevent mothers from recognizing their children, and Socrates even notes that the mothers will be prevented from the prolonged nurturing of any child (460c8-d5). It does not seem to be faction in general which Socrates tries to avoid in this section but rather particularly close relationships forming between parents and children.

Socrates' attempt to sever the bond between parent and child is accompanied by an attempt to prevent excessive attachment between man and wife, and this becomes especially clear in the second part of Socrates' description of communism. By regulating coupling according to the city's demands, Socrates assures that love affairs cannot be arranged in simple accordance with erotic inclinations nor prolonged by erotic desires, and Socrates draws attention to this in the second part of his discussion which is apparently dedicated to describing the limitation of reproduction to those in their prime (460d9-10). Such a discussion could have been quite brief; Socrates could simply forbid reproduction or intercourse for those outside their prime. Instead, Socrates makes several additions to the argument. First, after describing the prohibition of "engaging in reproduction" (*genneseon hapsetai*) for those outside their prime (461a3-b2), Socrates adds that the same law prohibits men and women of "begetting age" (*gennonton*) from "intercourse" (*haptetai*) without the city's sanction (461b4-7). This addition is out of place in the discussion of the limitation of reproduction to those in their prime, for these

men and women are within their prime. Furthermore, Socrates seems to make the law stricter for those in their prime; he particularly forbade reproduction (*genneseon hapsetai*) for those outside their prime, but he will not allow that those in their prime “*haptetai*”, which could mean as much as have sex and as little as touch. If one thinks Socrates is using “reproduction” and “intercourse” synonymously, one need only look to the next passage, where Socrates allows those over “the begetting age” (*ten helikian tou gennan*) “to have intercourse” (*suggignesthai*) with whomever they wish, besides their ancestors and progeny (461b9-c4), although he had said and will repeat that they may not reproduce (461a3-b2, 461c4-7). As Socrates’ warning to those past their prime confirms (461c4-7), the members of this class may still be capable of reproduction, and therefore the sexual freedom Socrates permits those past their prime cannot be explained as a consequence of his demand that children only be born of parents in their prime. Thus Socrates goes out of his way to indicate the restraints the city places on erotic desire, in particular by reminding us of the restraints on those in their prime and by making these the broadest.

The permission Socrates gives for voluntary intercourse to those who have passed their prime, which apparently violates the city’s repressive stance towards eros, perhaps most proves it, when we note that it is not also granted to those below their prime. This permission is not granted merely because those past their prime are no longer capable of reproduction, for Socrates says they must be warned to avoid conception, and, if this fails, to abort, or failing this, to expose the child (461c4-7). Since such means are

available to prevent reproduction,²⁴ if Socrates' purpose here is truly to limit childbirths to those in their prime, why does he not grant the same permission to those below their prime? It seems that Socrates has something else in mind to which he calls attention by adding this permission for the old and not the young. If we then recall Cephalus' or Sophocles' earlier suggestion that the old are relieved of sexual desires (329c5-7), Socrates' permission here is intelligible if his purpose is in fact only to prevent the formation of erotic attachments among the guardians, for such attachments, lacking strong sexual motives, would be weak and rare among the old.²⁵ Socrates' unnecessary mention of the limits placed on those in their prime is then of a piece with the permission he grants to the old and not the young in calling to our attention his desire to free the guardian class from erotic attachments.

The two parts of Socrates' description of communism thus serve to confirm that its likely effect, the weakening the guardians' attachments to their children and spouses, is in fact Socrates' primary purpose in proposing it, rather than providing perfect unity within the city or illustrating the monstrousness of such unity. Then, again, we must ask, why is Socrates so intent on limiting eros within the guardian class? I suggested at the outset that Socrates' ultimate purpose is to indicate what would be necessary for the rule of philosopher kings, and one may perhaps suspect something of this by glancing at the beginning of Socrates' description of the philosopher kings. For there he claims that

²⁴ See also *Laws* 740d.

²⁵ Compare also Socrates' later suggestions that *all* great labors belong to the young and that older men would be unlikely to share in the *madness* that may afflict youths when they first get a taste of dialectical refutations (536d3; 539c5-6, cf. 561a8-b1) with Socrates' depiction of eros as madness in both the *Republic* and *Phaedrus* (573a-c, cf. 403a10, *Phdr.* 245b5ff.), and with the arduous toils eros demands of the lover in the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* (*Phdr.* 252e5ff., *Symp.* 208c6-d2).

lovers love all members of the class of which they are lovers (474d-475c), and he thereby characterizes philosophy by an eros analogous to that which would be required of the guardians, who are not permitted to love some but not others.²⁶ Yet this analogy, suggestive as it may be, is beset by troubles, not only because Socrates contradicts this description of eros elsewhere (cf. 475a9-b2 with 496b4-5), but also because almost none of the guardians could become philosophers, and it is unclear why making the guardians' love similar to that of philosophers helps them fulfill their role in the city (cf. 495b2).

It would seem that before we can understand the role communism plays in facilitating philosophic rule, we must first understand more clearly the manner in which the guardians are to be ruled, and for this purpose we must look back to the earlier description of the guardians' life and education in books two through four. Of course, a study of these books is confronted by immense interpretive challenges, not least of which is discerning the details relevant to this study. Socrates, however, has perhaps given a suggestion as to where to begin, for he added to his discussion of communism's goodness the claim that communism accords with the entire regime and thus with that regime's education of the guardian class (461e6-7, 464c5ff.). But when Socrates defended this accordance, he indicated only communism's accordance with the prior abolition of material possessions, and he only argued that both help promote the city's unity (464b-d). Yet unity is not the true aim of the communism, and, as we noted at the outset, unity conflicts with the self-sufficiency and independence to which the guardians were to be educated (cf. 387d11-e1). Having seen, however, that Socrates' communism fails to

²⁶ See Ludwig (2007, 217-222).

produce unity and in fact is designed to further detach the guardians from one another, a possible accord with the earlier education appears precisely where it had seemed to be in conflict. For both the communism and the teaching of self-sufficiency would make the guardians more independent individuals. It thus seems that we must turn to this earlier stage of the guardians' education to see if we can better clarify Socrates' purpose.

Self-Sufficiency and the Music Education

Socrates' suggestion that the guardians should be as self-sufficient and therefore as little in need of others as possible occurs early in his description of the guardians' music education (387d11-e1), and, at the conclusion of this description, Socrates suggests that the purpose of the music education is to facilitate among the guardians a love (*eros*) of the noble or beautiful (*kalon*), which seems to include the endorsement of erotic affairs between the guardians (402d-403c). The suggestion that the education to self-sufficiency accords with the communism's attack on *eros* is thus confronted by the difficulty that the self-sufficiency itself seems to prepare or facilitate the proper *eros*. We must therefore investigate Socrates' description of such *eros*.

In the first place, it seems plausible that Socrates' description of the music education and its purpose undergoes some modification over the course of the discussion, and that therefore its concluding endorsement of *eros* for the beautiful does not adequately explain every element of the discussion. Such modification in the education's purpose is itself intelligible, in particular, in light of Socrates' indication that the

education must prepare two separate classes with two separate tasks. That is, the education is primarily for the guardian class as a whole, who, as Socrates' indicates, must be educated to be completely honest, but the rulers must also be educated, and rulers, of course, must lie (389b-c, cf. 382c7-10, 414b7ff.). The rulers are to be philosophers, and some indication that Socrates' permission of erotic affairs is offered more for the sake of the education of the philosophic rulers than for the guardians in general is suggested by Socrates' indication that musicality is the crucial characteristic of those suited to such affairs (402d8-9), and his subsequent indication of the close connection between music and the proper cultivation of the philosophic nature or part of the soul, which he makes immediately prior to raising the question of who among the guardians will rule (410e1, 411c4-5, e4-7, 412a4ff.).²⁷

Secondly, we must note that the love affairs Socrates permits are quite limited; sustained voluntary relations with a single beloved are permitted, but they are to be no more erotic, at least in deed, than a father's relationship with his son (403b4-6). In contrast with the moderate and relatively chaste affairs endorsed by Socrates for non-philosophers in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates here explicitly denies that any madness may be involved in the guardians' erotic affairs (403a10, cf. *Phdr.* 256b7-d6). Moreover, if one notes that Socrates limits himself to requiring only that one must not be reputed (*doxei*) to

²⁷ Consider also Socrates' remark immediately prior to his discussion of these affairs, in which he seems to suggest that "those whom we say it is necessary for us to educate to be guardians" must be able to know the forms of each virtue (402c1-6); that is, Socrates singles out the group of concern to him *here* as those who may attain a knowledge of virtue which would seem to surpass what could be expected of all but the rulers. Bolotin makes a similar suggestion regarding Socrates' reference to love affairs (1995), which he apparently supports by noting the general change in what the musical education is to depict, for it moves from the imitation of the gods' and heroes' speeches to only the good character of soul (90-91; cf. 401a5-b3 with 398a8-b4).

go further with a beloved than a father with a son (403b7-c1), one must also note that the leniency apparently permitted to what escapes notice is mitigated not only by the subsequent removal of privacy from the guardians (416d2ff.), but also, within the education itself, by the demand for complete honesty of the guardians to the rulers and by Socrates' censorship of such poetry as depicts Zeus' secluded affairs with Hera (389b-c, 390b5-c6). Indeed, much of the education, more or less explicitly, seems to oppose the development of attachments among the guardians: Socrates' tacit replacement of the desire to support one's fellows in battle with obedience to rulers as a motivation for battlefield discipline (cf. 389e8-9 with *Iliad* 3.8 and 4.431); his censorship of Homeric depictions of sex among the gods (390b6-c7); his condemnation of Achilles' "illiberal" and arrogant actions on behalf of Patroclus (390e-391c); and his prohibition of imitations of men in the grips of "loves" (*eroton*), which Socrates treats as a misfortune like sickness or drunkenness (396d1-3), all seem to oppose the guardians' forming attachments to one another. Finally, one may wonder if censoring the musical modes appropriate to wailing, drunkenness, and symposia does not also weaken eros (398d-e). It thus seems that Socrates here rewards the guardians, and perhaps also somewhat placates his interlocutors, with erotic affairs for the noble, which the education as a whole, to say nothing of the subsequent communism, does not support.

What remains and appears then to be the central concern of Socrates' conclusion to the music education is not the love affairs between beautiful guardians, but the nobility of the guardians, which Socrates suggests follows from the noble disposition produced by the musical education, and which renders the guardians lovable to musical men (402d1-4,

cf. 400d11-e3). The noble disposition is to be formed from the guardians' education in the virtues, especially courage and moderation (402c2-4, d1-4, 399c1-4, 399e8-11). Therefore, Socrates' endorsement of such self-sufficiency as would render the guardians least in need of one another is made in the course of his educational proposals to cultivate the guardians' devotion to virtue. Thus, it seems, Socrates here opposes eros in the name of virtue. In fact, Socrates' endorsement of this self-sufficiency occurs immediately after his discussion of courage and shortly before his discussion of moderation, but it is most explicitly linked to his prohibition of mourning among the guardians (387d-388d). This link between self-sufficiency and not mourning for lost loved ones further suggests the opposition between self-sufficiency and eros, but it is less clear why Socrates' opposition to mourning belongs to the guardians' education towards virtue, for, however much courage and moderation may seem to be virtues worth cultivating for their own sake, it is, no doubt, much less obvious why mourning must be so harshly prohibited. It is therefore to this prohibition that we must now turn.

Mourning

Socrates gives two reasons for his prohibition of mourning in book three. The first, which follows from his prior treatment of courage, is that a decent (*epieikos*) man will not believe death is anything terrible for the decent, and consequently he will not believe his companion suffered something terrible (387d1-6). The second reason, which is the primary object of our attention in this section, is that the decent man will be most self-sufficient and thus least in need of another (387d11-e1). This second reason seems

to be required, because, even granting the adequacy of the first, according to which the dead suffer nothing terrible, the living still lose their companions and may otherwise feel this as a loss to themselves. Socrates then characterizes the loss which the decent will least feel saying, “it is least terrible for him [the decent man] to be deprived of a son or brother, or *money*, or *another thing of this sort*” (387e3-4; my italics). Perhaps anticipating the effects of his subsequent discussion of communism or perhaps avoiding mention of the losses most unlikely to be accepted by his interlocutors, Socrates does not mention the loss of a lover or friend, but his subsequent censorship of Achilles’ grief for Patroclus suffices to indicate that friends or lovers are also not to be mourned (388a7-b4). We see then that Socrates places the loss of loved ones in the same class as he places the loss of money, which seems to be the class of possessions, and we may thereby begin to glimpse something of the opposition Socrates sees between mourning and virtue. It is, at the least, not shocking to require that virtue elevate one above concern with private possessions (cf. 547b2-7).

Socrates’ prohibition of mourning among the guardians requires the censorship of all examples of mourning by good men (387e9-388a1), and he continues his explanation of this prohibition by arguing that if the guardians hear depictions of such mourning they will not consider it unworthy (*anaxion*) of themselves (388d2-7, 388a1-3). Considering this suggestion along with Socrates’ prior claim that the decent would be least in need of those things for which people mourn, we conclude that the guardians should consider mourning to be unworthy of themselves because the losses for which people mourn are losses of things which are themselves unworthy of the guardians. This conclusion is

further supported in book ten, when Socrates re-raises the topic of mourning in the midst of his second treatment of poetry. There, Socrates suggests that law, which commands men to live virtuously (cf. 590e1-2 in context), gives among its reasons for opposing mourning that nothing “among the human things is worthy of great seriousness” (604b11-c1). Harsh as it may seem, the greatest devotion to virtue or the strictest adherence to law apparently requires that one regard all other possessions or attachments as insignificant in comparison with the dignity of virtue or law. Mourning encourages us to take our human attachments too seriously. Socrates admits in book ten that a decent man will lament his significant losses (603e7-9), and this lament will betray his belief in the importance of what is lost, thereby indicating his belief that lawfulness or virtue is not an unqualifiedly sufficient good. Lawfulness in this most strict sense demands that one regard obedience to the law as worthy of any sacrifice consistent with the law,²⁸ and, by mourning, the decent man strengthens the conflict in his soul regarding this demand.

While Socrates does confirm in book ten the existence of an opposition between virtue and mourning, he does so while exposing a troubling difficulty with the education of the guardians, for he admits here that rigorous obedience to the prohibition against mourning will be impossible (603e7-9). This admission was foreshadowed by his earlier suggestion that the guardians would find mourning an irresistible temptation if they were permitted to believe a good man ever mourned (388d2-7), for this suggestion in turn implied that the reasons given by Socrates for the ease with which the decent will accept

²⁸ This includes especially the sacrifice of one’s own life, of which possibility the decent man is probably acutely aware when he confronts the death of another (cf. 606a6-b8, where Socrates argues that pitying other’s sufferings strengthens one’s pity for oneself). See Bolotin (1995, 92).

their losses—that death is nothing terrible and that they are self-sufficient (377d1-e1)—were untrue. Socrates’ admission that the decent will mourn indicates either that these beliefs are simply unacceptable, or, at least, that they are unacceptable for the guardians.²⁹ Regarding the non-terribleness of death, belief in which is to support courage (386a-b), Socrates makes clear in book four that there is reason to have some question. He does this by explicitly limiting the virtue of the guardians to “political” courage which is based on “lawful opinion” (*doxas nomimou*) as opposed to courage simply (429c1-2, 7-8, 430a1-3, 442c1-3, cf. 430c3-5).³⁰ Socrates subsequently discusses courage in an individual as following from the obedience of the spirited part of the soul to the wise (*sophoi*), calculating part of the soul, which has knowledge (*epistemen*) (441d12-442c8), and it thus becomes clear that he is not educating the guardians towards true virtue.³¹ That the guardians are not being educated towards true virtue in turn puts in question their self-sufficiency, for that sufficiency was to be based on the sufficiency of their virtue, but this virtue is not genuine.

Even if Socrates’ education cannot instill true virtue in the guardian class, one may still suppose that Socrates recommends inculcating an approximation of this virtue in the guardians for the sake of making them relatively more virtuous in the service of their city and its laws. This suggestion is, however, also beset by difficulties. In the first

²⁹ That Socrates in book ten implicitly repeats the claims that death is nothing terrible and that the decent should be self-sufficient by putting the claim that human things are unworthy of seriousness in the mouth of law only and not reason suggests that these claims are simply inadequate, even for the philosopher (cf. 604a10-11 with 604b9ff.). See also Socrates’ argument beginning at 583b and my interpretation of it below.

³⁰ See Bolotin (1995, 87).

³¹ Cf. 518d9-e3 where Socrates disparages all virtues save that of prudence, which, in the context is the virtue necessary to philosophy (and not political life), along with Bruell’s explanation of this passage (1994, 271).

place, the guardians' self-sufficiency implies their independence from one another and the belief in the unworthiness of human things, but the law's command not to take human things seriously is contradicted by its usual concern with benefiting humans (604b11-c1).³² And Socrates shows that this is the usual purpose of law before his discussion of mourning in book ten, in his discussion of Homer's failure to take virtue seriously, where he faults Homer for failing to have been a good lawgiver and thereby benefiting human beings (599a6-b1, d2-e1). Thus, encouraging such inhuman self-sufficiency among the guardians would make them less useful servants of their fellows.

Furthermore, in the course of explaining exactly how poetry harms the decent, Socrates makes an argument which indicates how poetry is useful to cities, precisely because of the mourning it evokes. That is, Socrates indicates a sense in which such mourning as law and reason oppose is "reasonable" (*eulogoi*) (605e7-606a1, cf. 604a10-b1, 605e4-6), arguing that there is a part of the soul which "by nature" (*phusei*) seeks lament and which may satisfy this desire without shame while watching tragedy, directly pitying others rather than oneself (606a3-5).³³ Socrates emphasizes in this passage the

³² See Bolotin (1995, 92).

³³ While Socrates claims in this passage that the soul by nature desires this lament, and in this section of the argument he adopts the first person plural thus apparently including himself among the group seeking lament (605c10ff.), we cannot believe that Socrates is among this group. Rather, he seems to take up Glaucon's perspective here, so as to soften his criticism, and he points to the naturalness of such lament to indicate that it will necessarily exist in men who are not thoroughly educated, which is to say, in all men except a few philosophers. Saying such lament is natural thus means that it is a permanent obstacle of which the law must take account. Socrates makes allowance for his exceptional character by saying immediately before apparently including himself in the group of lament-seekers that some very few men escape corruption by poetry (605c7-8), and noting in this discussion that it is lack of education which permits such lament (606a7-8), and concluding the discussion by noting again that some few may, by calculation, avoid the temptation of poetry (606b5-7). See also Socrates' comment at 595b6-7, at the beginning of book ten's discussion of poetry, that those with knowledge have a remedy against corruption by poetry. Finally, compare Socrates' description of the faction within the mind of the man whose sufferings are depicted in tragic poetry (603c10-d7) with his description of the faction-free state of the philosopher's mind (586e4-5).

way tragic poetry leads us to pity men whom we see mourning, which means, strictly speaking, pitying those who are violating the law, or men we would be ashamed to resemble (605e5), but he also further suggests we might otherwise be disgusted (*bdeluttethai*) by these men (605e6). This disgust may suggest that the men pitied are not merely mourning but also denouncing or denying the gods, as may happen in tragedy. Poetry thus softens its audience towards such law-breakers, but if such criminality is inescapable, it is safer for the law that one feel pity primarily for others rather than for oneself in the midst of one's own outbursts, for in the latter case one then lets oneself off the hook for breaking the law. It is true that Socrates concludes this passage by arguing that pitying others will necessarily carry over to oneself (606b5-9), but the law could maintain its prohibition of mourning for oneself in public, which it could never stop in private, while allowing the natural inclination to mourn a place to vent at tragedies. Furthermore, by Socrates' own account earlier in the *Republic*, what is done to excess is likely to provoke a great change in the opposite direction (563e9-564a1). His primary example in this context is the movement from excessive freedom in democracy to tyranny (563e6-9), but it is not difficult to imagine an analogous movement against excessively repressive laws to excessive freedom. The law, by exceeding the capacity of the soul in its opposition to mourning would run the risk of a great rebellion. Permitting tragic poetry and the mourning that accompanies it may therefore alleviate some of this risk. Finally, suggesting that Socrates wishes subtly to propose such a use of tragic poetry in this passage allows us also to explain his referring here to the part of the soul which seeks lament as seeking "to lament sufficiently (*hikanos*) and to be satisfied

(*apoplesthenai*)” and his indication that this part of the soul is “fulfilled” (*pimplamenon*) by poetry (606a4-6), when he had earlier portrayed this part as “insatiable” (*aplestos*) (604d9): even if the soul’s desire for lament may not be fundamentally satisfied, as Socrates indicates again by pointing to the way the satisfaction offered by poetry strengthens the fundamental longing (606b5-8), poetry allows a temporary purging which may be the safest course for the community.

Because Socrates’ prohibition of mourning among the guardians and his censorship of mourning in poetry neither promotes true virtue nor seems to be especially useful to a city, we return again to the question of why Socrates makes this proposal. In book ten, Socrates indicates that it is both law and reason which oppose mourning (604a10-11), and if the demands of law do not suffice to justify Socrates’ proposal, it is perhaps in reason’s opposition to mourning that we must seek an explanation. The reasons Socrates gave for opposing mourning in book three have come to appear questionable, and it is therefore no surprise that Socrates’ intimations of mourning’s unreasonableness in book ten are of a different character. In giving new reasons for his opposition to mourning, however, Socrates also indicates more precisely exactly what mourning he wishes to restrain. Surely Socrates does not consider all suffering or awareness of one’s suffering unreasonable;³⁴ rather, in book ten, Socrates indicates reason’s opposition to both the lamentations and recollections of suffering (604d8-10) of decent men (603e3), who are of such a sort as to try to resist mourning (604a1-5), trying to obey the commands of law but evidently unable to hear the voice of reason (604a10-

³⁴ Socrates indicates that there will be no end to evils for men starting at 473c9-d6 (cf. Strauss 1964, 127), and it would be unreasonable for men not to feel badly in some way while suffering evils.

b1, b6ff.). That is, Socrates indicates, in particular, an opposition between reason and the mourning of the decent, law-abiding men who are incapable of living according to reason. We shall come to see why the law-abidingness of these men is linked to their unreasonable lamentations.

Of course it is such men as these who will primarily constitute the guardian class, for few can be philosophers and it is only philosophers who live in thorough accord with reason (491a9-b2, 495b2, 534b3-d1, 582d7-13). Therefore, the guardians will be susceptible to precisely that mourning which Socrates indicates is unreasonable. Yet there is an obvious oddity attending the suggestion that Socrates opposes the mourning of such men in the name of reason: namely, this class of men, precisely as Socrates presents them, cannot become truly reasonable. Socrates may only hope then, through his proposed education and institutional reforms, to make these men more like reasonable men. That is, false or unreasonable beliefs, as would be inculcated through the music education, and compulsory arrangements, such as book five's sexual legislation, would be necessary to make the men of the guardian class act more like reasonable men.³⁵ After some elaboration of the way in which the mourning of the decent opposes reason, we shall see more clearly why Socrates would propose such a modification in their behavior.

Socrates' indication of the unreasonableness of mourning occurs within his attempt in book ten to distinguish precisely "that [part or aspect] of thought" (*dianoias touto*) which is affected by imitative poetry, as opposed to that affected by painting (603b9-c1). Thus, despite Socrates' suggestions that poetry affects only the lower part of

³⁵ Cf. Bolotin (1995, 87).

the soul (604d8, 605a2-3, a10-b1), we see that Socrates' concern is with the thoughts, opinions, or beliefs with which poetry is associated.³⁶ The unreasonableness of the decent man's mourning will then consist in its reliance upon and strengthening of unreasonable opinions. Such opinions, being unreasonable, will contradict either each other or, at least, the true opinions, and Socrates makes quite prominent in this discussion a description of at least one contradiction in the opinions of the mourners. That is, Socrates focuses on the way these men, in part, hold to the lawful opinions and wish to obey the law while also resisting the lawful opinions (604a10ff.). Socrates makes explicit, however, only the claims of the law, leaving obscure what opinions exactly oppose these, and therefore it is to an examination of the lawful opinions that we must turn.

As Socrates presents it, the law gives four reasons for opposing mourning. **First**, the good and bad things in such situations as prompt mourning are unclear (604b10-11); this presumably means that an apparent loss, for which one mourns, may turn out not to be a loss. **Second**, the law claims, taking a loss badly is unproductive (604b11-12). **Third**, as we have already discussed, the human things are unworthy of great seriousness (604b12-c1). **Fourth**, being in pain impedes deliberation about what is best in one's new situation, which is the most needed thing (604c1-d2). The fourth reason is the only one which Socrates explains (604c5-d2), and it is this reason which Socrates indicates the best would be willing to follow (604d5-6). Thus, the fourth claim Socrates attributes to

³⁶ Cf. 603a1-8 where Socrates claims that it is a part of the soul other than the calculating part which opposes measure, but even here he admits that this "part" still opines (*doxazon*), and thus belongs to the opining part of the soul.

law must accord with reason, but Socrates' indication of the superiority of the fourth allows or suggests the inferiority of the law's remaining claims.

This inferiority is then confirmed, for the law's claims, upon scrutiny, contradict one another. Now Socrates' second claim accords well enough with the fourth, which may be taken as an explanation of the second claim. That is, taking a loss badly is unproductive, in particular, because the pain of taking a loss badly impedes deliberation. Alternatively, the advice given in the second claim, for the mourner just to move on, may be a second best, for those incapable of sound deliberation, so that they can now follow the counsel of others. Regardless of how one interprets the second claim, Socrates' emphasis on the superiority of the fourth claim sets apart, in particular, the first and third claims.³⁷ These two claims seem to be united in taking a superhuman view of mourning, for the first, in its denial that what has been felt to be a loss is actually a loss holds out the hope for some mysterious, presumably divine, compensation, while the third disparages human concerns directly.

Yet the first and third claims, united as they may be in their superhuman perspective, also oppose one another. For the first claim asserts the obscurity of the good in such affairs while the third (along with the second and the fourth, if, in a different way) makes a fundamental claim about the good (namely, that it is something superior to human things). The first claim does not deny the importance of human losses, but rather

³⁷ Cf. Benardete (1989, 220-221). Benardete notes the way the first and third claims belong together as do the second and fourth, and he indicates something of the tension between these claims, but I disagree both with his interpretation of the exact meaning of the third claim in particular, and his subsequent discussion (as far as I can understand it) of the significance of these claims. To state the disagreement briefly, it seems to me that Benardete does not give due weight to Socrates' attribution of these claims (especially the first and third) to law and not to reason.

denies that what is felt to be a loss is in fact one. But on what basis could the law deny that all apparent losses are losses in fact? The law could make this claim if it allows that human losses may ultimately be redeemed. Thus, the law-abiding man, by obeying the claims Socrates attributes to law, holds contradictory opinions about the good, and, in particular, regarding the importance or goodness of human things. To make this more concrete, it seems that the law-abiding man holds both that his apparent loss (of something human) may be compensated by divine assistance and that he must be above concern with such losses, devoted only to the (superhuman) law or virtue.

Socrates indicates, in this way, the contradictory opinions the law-abiding man holds, insofar as he obeys the law, but we have yet to see why his mourning, in particular, adds to or exacerbates these contradictions, such that Socrates seeks its prohibition. Bearing in mind the unreasonable character of his law-abidingness, let us turn to Socrates' description of the decent man's suffering. Socrates' description occurs within his characterization of what poetry imitates, in which the characteristics he attributes to the man imitated by poetry turn out to be those of a decent man suffering a significant loss (603c-e). Once again, Socrates draws attention to the confusion of this man, for poetry imitates men performing forced or voluntary actions (603c5), supposing themselves to have done well or badly in these deeds (603c5-6), feeling pain or pleasure in both the deeds and suppositions (603c6-7), and, "in all these things," Socrates asserts, this man is full of contrary opinions (603c10-d9). It is not difficult to see a characterization of tragedy in these terms: a man supposes he did well, voluntarily seizing a throne or taking a wife, and is pleased; but he discovers that due to ignorance his action

was involuntary, and, supposing he has done badly, having violated sacred laws, he feels pain. Yet this presentation is still too simple, for Socrates indicates that the man is confused throughout his deeds and during their aftermath, and he portrays the soul of such a man as fundamentally confused such that he cannot come to a final clear assessment of what has happened (603d5-7). In actions that primarily seem forced, this man will wonder if something still could not be done, just as when he chooses to act he will wonder if all his efforts might not be thwarted by fate. It is no surprise then, that he cannot resolve the question of what he has done well nor that his pains and pleasures are mixed.

The decent man who has suffered a significant loss will be in such a state of confusion, and this means that he will still be wondering if the loss, which in Socrates' view occurred by chance (603e3), was not deserved and whether perhaps something can still be done about it. He will wonder if his actions were virtuous and his pain will be mixed with some pleasure. This mixture of pleasure with the pain of the loss on the part of the grieving seems strange, for mourning seems to be an expression of pain, but Socrates indicates that there is a pleasure in mourning. Mourning is not presented as an automatic response to pain, for Socrates indicates that a part of the soul desires this mourning (604d8-9), and this part, perhaps always aware of the possibility of such losses, even seeks lament when no loss has recently occurred (606a3-4). This part of the soul is drawn to the pain, against the pull of obedience to the law, by "the experience itself" (*auto to pathos*) (604a10-b1), which it remembers and about which it complains (604d8-

9). Something in the painful loss attracts the decent man to recollect the pain of the loss, both to complain about it but also just to remember it.

What the decent man undergoes at such a loss is thus something complicated. It is complex, in the first place, because the decent man is torn between lawful restraint of his lament and his desire to lament. But the desire to lament is further complicated, because the lament is about the pain, but something in his awareness of the loss attracts the decent man to remembrance of the loss. Socrates characterizes the part that is attracted to the loss as “irrational, idle, and a friend of cowardice” (604d9-10). We are trying to grasp precisely what is meant by its “irrationality,” and we shall have to wait until we return to book three and its suggestion of the connection between the prohibition of mourning and courage to explain the cowardice, but Socrates’ assertion of the idleness of this part of the soul may seem especially perplexing, given the lamentations and reminiscences it tirelessly provokes (cf. 604d9). Recalling, however, Socrates’ understanding of idleness from book five, where the idle were characterized by their thoughts or fantasies of seemingly good things without consideration of their possibility (cf. 458a-b with pg. 27 above), we perhaps receive a clue regarding the attraction the decent man feels for mourning.

That is, the attraction to lament is explicable in terms of a certain idleness of soul that resists considerations of what is possible. The lamentations of the decent would seem to include expressions of outrage at the injustice of their losses (605d6), which feeling is likely given their doubts as to whether the losses were merited, and this outrage may be made more severe due to their not knowing whether mysterious divine forces

have not thwarted them, causing the losses. Even apart from the hope that the expression of outrage may improve one's situation, there would be a feeling of pleasure in its expression, for, in condemning the gods' injustice, one would be elevating oneself above them; even in complaining about one's own guilt, as may also happen when one does not know the limits of one's responsibility, one would feel pleasure in elevating oneself above oneself. Furthermore, despite their outrage, these men also still hope for divine assistance, as is shown by their (partial) belief in the claims of law, and this still lurking hope leaves them wondering if something still might not be done, perhaps when the gods hear their cries of indignation. These men would be drawn simply to recollect and express their sufferings, for such reminiscence would bring with it, along with the awareness of what was lost, the thought of their own and their loved one's hitherto unrewarded virtue and therefore the hope that they may still be rewarded. Not despite, but rather because of one's tears—and the admission of the severity of the loss which they imply—the decent would maintain a, perhaps hidden, belief that just gods will compensate their loss.³⁸ Such hopes may then be characterized as idle, for they are not accompanied by an investigation of the possibility of their fulfillment, as Socrates indicates by suggesting the irremediable confusion of the decent in such situations.

³⁸ It may be helpful to remind the reader here of my evidence that such hopes and concern with virtue belong to the decent mourner. The first claim of law and Socrates' indication that these men cannot know what is necessary and thus involuntary show that these men believe and are concerned with the possibility of supernatural assistance, which implies gods of some form or other. The third claim of the law and Socrates' indication that these law-abiding men are concerned with assessing how well they have done show their concern for virtue. The direct link between a concern for virtue and divine hopes is, I admit, nowhere made perfectly explicit (although see 605b7-c4, which I interpret below, and see above all 361b5-d3 and the request of Glaucon and Adeimantus at the outset of book two more generally); by suggesting such a link, however, we can both indicate a connection between the otherwise divergent first and third claims of law, and we can also understand the attractiveness of mourning to the decent man as Socrates describes him.

We cannot answer here why Socrates would have regarded such hopes as impossible (cf. 382e2-3), but he has given sufficient indication of why the decent are to be regarded as not having carried out an investigation of their possibility. Socrates portrays the decent as hoping that the gods will take care of humans and thus believing that humans are worthy of such care, while also indicating that they believe humans unworthy of such concern. Furthermore, the denial of the worthiness of human things is made in the name of law or virtue, but it would seem that humans are especially worthy of divine aid precisely because of their devotion to virtue over all other concerns. The virtue of the decent, which supports their hope in the gods, is thus undermined by that very hope, as it betrays the incompleteness of their devotion to virtue.

The poets imitate the character of a man who engages in such mourning (604e2), and seeing this imitation “arouses” and “nourishes” the part of the soul which seeks mourning (605b2-3). Poetry does this, as Socrates goes on to say, by leading one to mourn for others (605d3-4). Thus the act of mourning itself also strengthens the mourning part of the soul. The decent man’s mourning is therefore prohibited because of the contradictory opinions rooted in hopes for divine assistance to which mourning gives expression and thereby strengthens. It is in this way that we can understand Socrates’ conclusion to his discussion of the part of thought associated with poetry (cf. 603b10-c1), for here, Socrates says that poetry produces, “a bad regime in the private soul of each, gratifying the unintelligent part of it, which doesn’t distinguish the more and the less, but believes the same things are then great and then small, and which makes phantom images

(*eidola eidolopoiounti*) very far removed from the truth” (605b6-c4).³⁹ Mourning harms the decent by strengthening their soul’s inability to consistently maintain either the greatness or smallness of some things, which incapacity belongs to the same part of the soul that makes false images. From our previous interpretation, it seems that Socrates here confirms the incapacity of the decent to be consistent regarding the worth of human things, and this incapacity is directly linked to their fabrication of false images of gods.

We must return to book three to confirm that this is an adequate interpretation of Socrates’ prohibition of mourning, but, before doing so, let us note one further aspect of mourning which Socrates calls to our attention in book ten, for this is of some relevance to the study of eros as a whole. After finishing his discussion of the part of thought associated with poetry, Socrates turns to an explanation of how exactly poetry harms the decent men (605c6). Here, Socrates indicates that pity is the basic means by which tragic poetry affects these men; what is considered good poetry inspires the decent to “suffer with” (*sumpaschontes*) and “pity” (*eleein*) its suffering heroes (605d4, 606b3). But Socrates further notes that the decent praise not only the poet as a good poet for causing them to share the hero’s sufferings, for they also praise the suffering man himself, despite his making great laments, which they would be ashamed to utter in public (605d4-5, e4-6, 606b3).

It is of course most striking that the decent men praise the lamenting hero despite the fact that they would feel ashamed to imitate him. Socrates indicates nothing about the

³⁹ Here, I follow the better attested text rather than Burnet’s edition, reading *eidolopoiounti* instead of *eidolopoiounta* at 605c3. This translation not only has the advantage of following the better supported text, but also, by attributing the image making to the part of the soul which is influenced by poetry rather than to the poetry itself, it brings out more clearly Socrates’ objection to poetry in this passage, as I hope to have shown: namely, that the men influenced by poetry or mourning are led to produce false images of the gods.

hero outside the fact that he is greatly lamenting, but his indication that the poets are praised precisely for their ability to induce a certain suffering suggests that the decent may find something in the suffering itself praiseworthy,⁴⁰ and that they praise the hero precisely for his lament. We have indicated why mourning may be partially enjoyable but we have not yet explained its praiseworthiness. Perhaps there is something praiseworthy in the strength or degree of feeling expressed, but this degree of feeling seems to have been something with which all the decent, at least those Socrates discusses, were familiar (cf. 604a6-8, 606a3-5), and thus not something very worthy of distinction. On the other hand, the mourning Socrates discusses is primarily mourning over the loss of another person (cf. 603e3-4). Indeed, in this context he identifies the mourning part of the soul (*tou threnodous*) with the pitying part (*to eleinon*) (cf. 606a3-5, a8-b1 with b7-8), and this mourning therefore expresses, in addition to his own sense of loss,⁴¹ the decent man's devotion to another. Such devotion may be opposed by the law insofar as it is devotion to another person, rather than to the law, but the law itself demands such devotion to itself ultimately for the sake of benefiting other humans (cf. 599d4-5, e2). It is therefore no surprise if the mourner, in displaying his suffering at the loss of another, seems to display something of the selflessness demanded by law and thereby seems virtuous or praiseworthy.

⁴⁰ Cf. 605e6, where the object of the praise to which Socrates there refers is not perfectly clear. He indicates that we see a man whom we would be ashamed to resemble, but, instead of disgust, the sight produces joy and praise. Thus, Socrates most likely indicates that the praise is of the otherwise shameful deeds of lament. At 605d4-5, Socrates indicates that we praise the poets for making us suffer with their heroes; then at e6 he suggests the praise is of the suffering itself, and finally, at 606b3, Socrates indicates that the praise is of the suffering man. It is not a stretch to say the praise is of the man for his suffering.

⁴¹ As Socrates makes clear, the pity is both for others and for oneself (606b5-8), but pity comes first to sight as a feeling for others (606b3).

Socrates argues here that pitying others in their mourning will ultimately strengthen one's own mourning (606b5-7), and, as noted above, he here calls the mourning part of the soul its pitying part (606b7-8), thereby suggesting that the mourning of the decent, if not identical to pity, includes pity. This pity is not merely for others, for Socrates says this pity will not be easily held down in "his own (*autou*) sufferings (*pathesi*)" (606b8), and he therefore does not limit the pity to the sight of others' sufferings nor even to the sight of the sufferings of those loved ones for whom one mourns.⁴² Thus, the decent man's mourning includes self-pity, and this self-pity implies his looking on himself and his sufferings as a spectator. In this case, the decent, observing their own concern for others, are likely also, perhaps secretly, to praise themselves as they praise the heroes for their own sufferings, and by so praising themselves they betray the belief that the mourning or the suffering it expresses is itself virtuous. The mourning of the decent may be opposed to reason therefore not only by the irrational hopes and view of virtue that accompany it, but also because the act of mourning may itself be experienced as such an act of virtue as would entail, for the decent, such irrational hopes. In this case, book five's communism can be explained as an attempt to remove not only those attachments which most commonly provoke mourning, but also those erotic attachments which inspire such devotion to another as would make mourning over the loss of that other seem most virtuous. I have argued that the law's demand of selfless devotion seems to be fulfilled, if not in devotion to the law,

⁴² The decent man is always seeking lament (604d9, 606a3-5), even when no loss has recently occurred, and thus he apparently also seeks to lament possible future losses, which would include that of his own life.

then in one's devotion to another person, and that this devotion may consequently take on the semblance of virtue.

The Prohibition of Mourning in Book Three and its Place in the Education of the Guardians

Mourning thus seems to be a response to one's awareness of a loss, but it is an incomplete awareness, for it is coupled with irrational beliefs and hopes that the loss can somehow be avoided or mitigated. These beliefs, when made explicit, entail hope for divine assistance, and it is to weaken such irrational hopes as these that, I suggest, Socrates seeks to prohibit mourning among the guardians. Returning now to book three, we shall see that this suggestion is supported by Socrates there. In the first place, all those examples Socrates gives from the *Iliad* of the mourning whose imitation he wishes to eliminate, when they are read within their context in the *Iliad*, betray such an incomplete awareness or acceptance of the loss on the part of the mourner.

Socrates' first example is of Achilles, tossing and turning, unable to sleep, then pacing along the beach, mourning the death of Patroclus (388a7-b1); Achilles seems to feel the need to do something, but is incapable of finding something to do. In the context, Homer tells us that Achilles still longs for Patroclus, while remembering the great deeds they performed together (*Iliad* 24.6-8), and, immediately after the passage quoted by Socrates, Achilles returns to dragging Hektor's corpse, trying to deface it (24.14-21). Achilles thereby confirms that he does not accept the finality of death, in the first place of

Hektor's, but presumably also his own and that of Patroclus.⁴³ Before his second quotation, Socrates also mentions the need to censor the depiction of Achilles covering his head with ash (388b1-2). If we consult the context of this reference, we find Achilles again lamenting the death of Patroclus (18.20ff). His goddess mother, Thetis, hears this lament (18.35), which results in her own lament (18.37) and ultimately in her procuring new armor for her son (18.136-137). Thus, in this case, Achilles' lament is followed by divine assistance.

Socrates' second quotation is of Priam mourning the loss of Hektor (388b6-7). In the *Iliad*, Priam is depicted at this point begging the Trojans to let him try to recover Hektor's corpse (22.413ff); he then expresses the wish that Hektor might have died in his arms so that he and his wife might satisfy themselves in mourning for him (22.426-428). Priam presumably believes that he could thus satisfy himself for the same reason that he wishes to recover the corpse, namely, because he could then provide it a proper funeral. Priam's wish therefore implies his belief that his loss of Hektor is not something simply beyond his power to remedy, at least partially.⁴⁴

Socrates' final three quotations are of gods in the *Iliad* who lament the loss of mortals dear to them. The third of the five quotations is especially instructive. Here (388c1), Thetis is depicted after having heard Achilles' own lament, (the second example of Achilles mourning, as discussed above), and she now laments her son's sufferings and early death (18.54ff). Her cries attract the attention of many goddesses who come to her

⁴³ Cf. Apollo's comment that Achilles accomplishes nothing by dragging the corpse, although Achilles does not seem to understand this (*Iliad* 24.52).

⁴⁴ For the connection between funerals and hopes for divine assistance in the afterlife in Homer and Socrates' awareness of this connection see *Iliad* 23.70-76 with *Republic* 386d4-5 and 387a2-3, along with my subsequent discussion of the afterlife in Homer.

side (18.37), but she says explicitly, despite her son's many sorrows, "I can do nothing to help him" (18.62).⁴⁵ Thus Thetis does not seem to experience such an incomplete acceptance of her loss. Yet, only a few pages later in the *Iliad*, Thetis repeats this same lament (cf. 18.56-62 with 18.437-443), again asserting her impotence, as she begs Hephaestus to make armor for Achilles. That is, Thetis repeats the lament and expresses her own impotence precisely in order to move a god to help her and her son. Furthermore, her lament also invokes her merit to receive such a reward, indicating her virtue as a mother (18.54) and the sacrifices she has made in obedience to Zeus' will (18.429-434). Thus, Socrates' central quotation points to a case of self-pity in which the one pitying herself hopes thereby to receive divine aid.

Socrates' final two quotations are both of Zeus, in the first case lamenting the loss of Hektor, in the second, Sarpedon, and in both cases Zeus laments shortly before the respective hero's death (388c4-d1). In the *Iliad*, Zeus is in each case depicted considering whether he should rescue the beloved mortal (16.435-438, 22.174-175), and he is in both cases rebuked by a goddess to whom he then assents (16.458, 22.185). The rebuke in both cases reminds Zeus that he is mourning the death of a mortal and asks whether he wishes to rescue, "one long since doomed by his destiny from ill-sounding death" (16.441-442, 22.179-180). Zeus's lament and the wish accompanying it is thus rejected by asserting the inescapability of death.

The mourning which Socrates wishes to prohibit among the guardians thus does seem to be bound to an incomplete acceptance of death and hopes for help from the gods.

⁴⁵ All translations of Homer are from Lattimore (1951), (1965).

Bearing this in mind, we may now better understand Socrates' previous censorship in book three of the Homeric myths regarding the afterlife, and thereby better understand the place of Socrates' prohibition of mourning in book three's education of the guardians. Adeimantus suggests and Socrates accepts that the censorship of Homeric depictions of mourning is necessary if the previous censorship of Homeric depictions of Hades was necessary, and Socrates appears then to add that the consideration of the reason for censoring the laments will confirm the necessity of censoring the afterlife (387d3-4). But Socrates claims to oppose Homer's depictions of Hades because the terrors presented there would render courage impossible (386b4ff.), not because of the hopes for an afterlife which these depictions might encourage and which motivate his prohibition of mourning. Yet an examination of the examples of what should be censored again shows that for the Homeric heroes the afterlife was not merely awaited with terror. In his list of Homeric depictions worthy of censorship, Socrates' central example shows most clearly that Hades was not merely terrifying, for it shows that it is at least possible for one to be intelligent in Hades (386d7, cf. 386d5);⁴⁶ and, the contexts in the *Odyssey* of Socrates' first and last quotations (386c5-7, 387a5-8), present Achilles, despite his complaints, as experiencing happiness in Hades (*Odyssey* 11.540, 24.36). In the first case, the happiness is due to his hearing of the excellence of his son (*Odyssey* 11.522-523, 540), and in the second case, it is due to his noble and glorious death and funeral (24.36ff). Furthermore, two of the quotes point to the desire of Patroclus' ghost for a funeral which would allow him to gain admission to Hades (386d4-5, 387a2-3; *Iliad* 23.70-76).

⁴⁶ See Bolotin (1995, 85).

The depictions of Hades which Socrates opposes are therefore not so simply terrible as he alleges, and this in turn explains why, as Socrates subsequently notes, these stories do not merely make the Homeric heroes cower in fear of death but also make them “hotter” than is desired (287c4-5). That is, the Homeric Hades may cause excessive anger and the daring deeds rooted in that anger through the hopes they support in the afterlife.⁴⁷ Socrates’ censorship of these depictions then belongs together with his censorship of examples of mourning as both may seek to promote a sort of courage in which the guardians would face death with less reliance on irrational hopes.

If we turn now to the beginning of the education, that is, the theological teaching which Socrates asserts is of the greatest importance (377e6-7), we see that such courage as would limit the hopes of the guardians for divine assistance would be necessary for their thorough acceptance of Socrates’ teaching. To indicate the most decisive points, the guardians are not to believe that the gods ever harm men, even the evil (380b2-4), nor that the gods are concerned with benefiting any humans except, perhaps, the wise (cf. 382c8-10 with 382e2-4). Socrates introduces this theology with the admission that false tales will be used in education (377a4-5), but, as we see in his argument for the theology, truth becomes the standard which determines what is fit to be said of the gods (379a7-8).⁴⁸ Why does Socrates propose such a standard? It is clear from our whole discussion that the truth of this theology will be impossible for the guardians genuinely to accept and that this theology is in some tension with the ordinary foundation of virtuous behavior. Based as it is on truth, it would seem that this theology is made with an eye to the

⁴⁷For a much more extensive treatment of this, see Bolotin (1995, 85-87).

⁴⁸See Strauss (1964, 98).

demands of philosophy. It is not, however, that Socrates wishes to make all the guardians philosophers, but rather, that Socrates needs to make the guardian class, which holds the military force of the community, safe for the city (cf. 375c1-4), which means, above all, that the guardians must accept philosophic rule.

Part One Conclusion

Socrates indicates that philosophic liberation from the city's, any city's, view of the lawful and virtuous and therefore also its view of the gods inspires murderous hatred (492d5-7, 517a5-6). For philosophers to rule as philosophers, with their claim to authority lying only in their reason, the guardian class as a whole would have to accept such a theology as requires the prohibition of mourning and ultimately the destruction of the familial attachments which inspire mourning. Socrates knows and shows that this philosophic rule is impossible. He indicates the impossibility of philosophic rule most clearly by his suggestion at the end of book seven, that philosophic rule would require first purging the city of all those older than ten (540d-541b);⁴⁹ but he indicates the deepest impediment to philosophic rule through his concession in book ten that men such as the guardians are to be will necessarily mourn (603e3-9), for, as we have discussed, this concession implies the impossibility of their holding to the city's theology. The answer to the question of why Socrates responds to Glaucon and Adeimantus' demand for a defense of justice by showing at such length the requirements and the impossibility

⁴⁹ See Strauss (1964, 126-127).

of philosophic rule would take us quite far beyond our concern with eros,⁵⁰ but for the purpose of this study of eros we must note the following. The ultimate purpose of the communism of the family discussed in book five is not the unity or production of the best offspring that Socrates alleges in book five, but rather the destruction of the private family. The destruction of the family is sought so as to prevent the guardians' forming those attachments which lead to mourning. Such mourning, as Socrates' analysis of it in book ten shows and as the examples in book three from Homer which he wishes to censor confirm, would prevent the guardians' adherence to the theological teaching of book two. Thus, the *Republic* presents ordinary erotic attachments as opposed to philosophy because of the irrational beliefs in the gods and the inability to accept mortality which inevitably accompanies these attachments among the decent. Socrates' apparent wish to rid the city of eros is thus an indication of the tendency towards irrational religious belief characteristic of ordinary eros. To see why eros has this tendency, we shall have to wait for the treatments of eros in the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, just as we shall have to wait to see if there are other forms of eros more worthy of praise or if even this irrational form of eros deserves praise when viewed from a perspective other than that concerned with philosophic rule.

⁵⁰ For an explanation, see Bruell (1994, 267, 273).

Part Two: Tyrannic Eros

Before turning to the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, let us first investigate the second part of Socrates' harsh treatment of eros in the *Republic*, that of book nine, where he portrays eros as the key to the development of the tyrannic soul. By doing so, we provide some confirmation of the interpretation presented above of book five's treatment of eros. Thus far, we have considered Socrates' opposition to the eros of the decent law-abiding citizens as it is presented, above all, in his best city's communism of the family. Thus, we have considered the *Republic's* most strikingly unerotic feature, yet this is not its most anti-erotic discussion, for Socrates reserves his harshest and most explicit criticism of eros for the discussion of tyranny in book nine. There, Socrates portrays eros as the source of corruption in the most corrupt of souls, that of the tyrannic man (572e4-6, 576b4-9, 587a13-b6). To be sure, Socrates only suggests that eros has so corrupting an effect on the soul of a democratic son who is already tempted to rebel (573a2), yet Socrates hardly draws attention to this limitation to his blame of eros, and he does draw much attention to a link between eros and both madness (573a8-b1) and hostility to law (cf. 571b4-c4 with 574d5-e1), a link which we must understand in order to understand Socrates' harshness towards eros.

In book nine, eros first appears as the key to corruption. Since book eight, Socrates has been giving an account of the corruption of regimes and of individuals corresponding to those regimes. It is an account of the descent from the best city and best individual to that of timocracy (547b-550c), oligarchy (550c-555a), democracy (555b-562a), and then, finally tyranny (562aff.). In each case, the origin of the corrupt regime

or individual is traced to the preceding kind of regime or individual, and therefore the tyrannic individual is described as descending from a democratic father. Eros is the key to this descent. That is, in Socrates' description of the descent from a democratic to a tyrannic individual, it is by the arousal of eros that a youth raised in the democratic manner of his father is finally led to reject his upbringing (572d8-e6). That democratic upbringing was characterized by nothing so much as easygoingness (cf. 561d5-7), as the democratic man acted on each desire as it occurred to him (561c6-7, 572d2). Of course, such easygoingness requires the neglect of those desires that make the satiation of a great variety of desires impossible, and Socrates indicates something of this shortcoming in the democratic man's attempt at equal treatment of desires by noting the democratic man's repression in his waking life of those desires that are hostile to law, immediately prior to his discussion of the tyrant's genesis (561c3-4, 572d2-3, cf. 571b4ff, 574d7-e2). Yet, while eros is the source of the youth's corruption which culminates in his embrace of such hostility to law as his father represses in himself (574e2-3), eros itself is not said to be so directly hostile to law; rather, eros leads other desires which themselves only eventually lead to such outright hostility to law (cf. 572e6-573a1 with the development from 573d7-575a4).

In fact, Socrates characterizes the youth's eros as a "winged drone" (573a1-2). In book eight, Socrates had characterized those who had squandered their wealth and become impoverished as drones (552c2-4), and Socrates then divided drones into two classes, those with stingers and those that are stingless; all the winged drones, he tells us,

are stingless (552c6-7).⁵¹ Finally, Socrates indicated that only those drones with stingers are criminals, while the others were beggars (552c8-d1). Thus, the youth's rejection of the democratic man's morality, led as it is by eros, is not first made for the sake of the criminality or hostility to law which his father represses. In characterizing eros as a drone, Socrates likens it to an impoverished man who wishes to regain his wealth (552c2-4),⁵² and this would seem to mean that despite or because of his father's very permissiveness, the erotic youth feels some lack which requires the rejection of his father's way of life. Eros thus comes to sight as a source of discontent with a way of life that at least claims to allow contentment of all desires.

Eros leads the youth away from the ways of his father and, by so doing, places the youth in an environment where his eros itself is corrupted; eros is strengthened and given a stinger through its association with the pleasures of "incense, myrrh, crowns, wines" and the other pleasures of "such societies" (573a4-8). The possession of a stinger, then, leads eros to take madness as its guard (573a8), and this madness, led by eros, purges the youth of shame and moderation (573b1-4), at which point the youth has become a tyrannic man (573b5). Socrates explains this madness only by saying that the madman "attempts and hopes to be able to rule not only humans but also gods" (573c3-5). By highlighting the impious or hubristic character of the tyrannic man's madness, Socrates helps clarify the role of those pleasures which first gave eros a stinger and thus opened the door to madness, for the pleasures Socrates lists—incense, myrrh, crowns, and

⁵¹ The precise meaning of "winged" is not clarified, so far as I can tell, in the *Republic*; the discussion of wings in Socrates' palinode in the *Phaedrus* may be of some help.

⁵² The impoverished aspect of eros is made a theme in Socrates' speech in the *Symposium* (*Symp.* 203b1ff).

wine—were all customary adornments of Greek religious ceremonies.⁵³ Thus, Socrates portrays eros as being strengthened and given a stinger by desires and pleasures which surround it, overflowing with these religious adornments. It seems that eros comes to be the leader of and guarded by a madness which hopes to rule the gods after first having itself been treated or worshiped as a god. It is difficult to say in exactly what the worship of eros consists; it is implausible that the future tyrant would consciously assert that his eros is a god. It seems, however, that Socrates suggests that the desires and pleasures which surround and adorn eros lead the future tyrant to regard his eros, at least tacitly, as something worthy of worship; he exalts his eros in the manner of a god, implying that its worth is equal to that of a god.

The suggestion that eros is corrupted by something like religious worship is further supported by Socrates' description of the youth's corrupters, for he calls them not only "tyrant makers" (*turannopoioi*) but also "wizards" (*magoi*) who therefore may aspire to supernatural creations (572e4-5). And if we look to the final crime Socrates attributes to the tyrannic man before explaining the complete corruption of his soul by criminal opinions, which, as we shall see, play the same role as madness, we find the tyrannic man cleaning out (*neokoresei*) a temple: the tyrannic man takes what belongs to a temple for himself and is then thoroughly corrupted (574d1-8). Socrates choice of a euphemism for the man's robbery creates an ambiguity between the literal piety and the implied impiety of what he describes. Eros, which as a drone must be impoverished, gives rise to madness, when worshipped as a god. Such exaltation of eros may lead to the

⁵³ See Burkert (1985, 56, 62, 73, 97, 99-100, 368-369).

youth's forgetting the poverty or neediness implied by his eros, thus preparing the way for the mad hope to rule over gods, and such madness, in turn, makes a fitting guard for this tyrannic eros, preventing it from discovering its mistake. Such a development seems plausible in the soul of a democratically raised youth, for such a youth would not have been taught to subordinate his strongest passions to the demands of the laws or gods. Nothing therefore prevents his complete exaltation of eros once it is aroused, and the striking difference between the feeling of erotic devotion and the easygoingness by which he is surrounded may make eros appear especially worthy of worship.

In his initial discussion of the tyrannic man's eros, Socrates gives no indication of its erotic object or aim, but, to judge by his subsequent discussion of how such a man lives (573c11ff), Socrates means eros in the ordinary sense of love of another human being (574b12-c5). Of course, Socrates' subsequent discussion of actual tyrants (who rule cities) seems to suggest that tyrannic rule of the city is the ultimate aim (575d8-9), but in his discussion of actual tyrants, Socrates refrains from mentioning eros, referring to tyrannic rule as the end of the tyrant's "desires", and calling the actual tyrant the one with the greatest tyrant (not necessarily the tyrant eros) in his soul (575c8-d1, contrast 573d4, 574e2, 575a1). Thus Socrates must go to great lengths to assimilate the tyrant's treatment of his fatherland and motherland to the model of the tyrannic individual's treatment of his father and mother (cf. 574b12-c5 with 575d3-8). Furthermore, the dissolute tyrannic individual, ruled by corrupt eros, hardly seems likely to make a successful tyrant, and in book eight Socrates already gave an account of the development of a political man into a tyrant which seems far more plausible, and which suggests that

tyrants must come from “a root of leadership” (565d1ff). Finally, the individuals corresponding to each regime were not, in the other cases, members of the ruling class in those regimes.⁵⁴ It thus seems plausible that Socrates grafts political tyranny onto his description of the tyrannic individual, so that his argument for the wretchedness of the most corrupt individuals will apply to the perpetrators of the greatest injustice (578b9ff).

Thus we take the eros of the tyrannic individual to be love of another human being, but although this eros guides the tyrannic man, it is not his sole motivation, for eros unleashes and is accompanied by a variety of desires (572e6-573a1). These desires seem to be for a variety of decadent pleasures—Socrates mentions “feasts, revels, parties, and courtesans” (573d2-3)—and these pleasures may further serve to create an environment conducive to the easy satisfaction of erotic desire (if on the basest level). Eros’ leadership of these desires presumably then consists in ordering them around and subordinating them to the attainment of the erotic object. Feasts, revels, parties, and courtesans are enjoyed but also used to help enable erotic satisfaction.

In addition to guiding these desires, eros is also guarded by them (573e7). In his description of the tyrannic man’s genesis, Socrates had assigned the role of bodyguard to madness (573a8), and in his concluding description of the tyrannic man’s corruption he assigns the role to opinions (574d7-8).⁵⁵ Both madness and opinions seem to “guard” eros by directing the tyrannic man’s mind away from opposing beliefs (573b1-4, 574d5-

⁵⁴ See Bloom (1968, 419); Benardete (1989, 194).

⁵⁵ I here take the pronoun “*hai*” to refer to opinions (574d7), as there is no other substantive in the context which makes sense. Should the *hai* be meant more ambiguously, it is not a mistake to include opinions within its meaning, for Socrates has already indicated that corruption involves a change of both desires and opinions (573b1-3).

7).⁵⁶ It is therefore likely that the tyrannic man's desires, noisy, painful, and expensive as they may be (573d10-574a1, 572e6-573a1), serve as a bodyguard for eros, not only by making erotic satisfaction easier, but also by diverting attention to their fulfillment and away from any concerns the tyrannic man may have about their or his goodness (cf. 573e7-a1, 574a3-4). Finally, Socrates calls these desires "idle" when he first mentions them, despite their great demands and activity (572e6), and, considering the impossible hopes entailed by the madness which also guards eros, it is likely that the idleness of these desires is to be interpreted as we have interpreted it elsewhere (see pages 27, 54-56 above), as indicating the failure to consider what is possible. That is, the desires associated with eros depend upon illusions about what is possible.

The tyrannic man's eros needs a bodyguard, it therefore seems, because it is at risk of attack from moral and rational considerations. Socrates' alternative suggestions that madness, then desire, and then opinion serve as the bodyguard could suggest a development in the course of corruption: first, in a frenzy, one turns away from one's upbringing; this permits the arousal and intensification of desires which further the corruption, culminating ultimately in the tyrannic man's actually believing that his actions are good. Yet, even if opinions only change at the conclusion of the corruption, Socrates does not indicate that the process can be simply completed, for he says the change of opinions occurs "throughout all these" [crimes], suggesting that the change is

⁵⁶ This is especially well evidenced if we follow the better attested reading at 574d6-7, *tas dikas poioumenas*, rather than Burnet's preferred *tas dikaias poioumenas*, for in this case, the target of eros' bodyguard is those opinions which act as judges (see Bloom 1968, 469-470 n.4): eros needs to be guarded from beliefs which condemn it.

constantly occurring.⁵⁷ The moral opinions need to be continually mastered and remastered, and this in turn explains why the soul's purgation of moral beliefs at its first corruption, in the course of which Socrates says any moral opinions are slain (573b1-3), needs to be repeated and also why a "bodyguard" for eros continues to be necessary. The necessary incompleteness of the tyrannic man's corruption may be readily explained if the corrupt opinions themselves depend upon or presume lawful beliefs, as madness, which like opinion serves as a bodyguard, must depend on some belief in the gods in order to hope to rule over them.

The corrupt opinions' dependence on lawful ones is suggested by Socrates' explanation of them. The opinions which prevail in the tyrannic man are those formerly repressed except in dreams (574d8-e2), and these opinions must therefore be the accompaniment to the desires admitted in dreams, which Socrates discussed at the outset of book nine. These desires constitute a class of the unnecessary desires which are hostile to law (*paranomoi*) (571b4-5). These desires are repressed except in dreams, when the other parts of the soul rest, but these desires emerge especially when the beastly part of the soul has been strengthened by overfeeding, and thus they do not seem to be merely a response to excessive repression (571c3-7). This wild part of the soul now "dares to do everything" (571c7-8) and "leaves out no folly or shamelessness" (571d3-4), and Socrates indicates no purpose or overall aim which would limit the acts dared. Socrates does, however, make some of the acts explicit: incest or intercourse with anyone else, including gods, any murder, and any food (571c9-d3). The reference to food seems

⁵⁷ See also 577e2-3, where Socrates says the tyrant's soul will always be full confusion and regret.

impossible to understand as anything but a euphemism for cannibalism, and, in the context, the reference to murder seems to point to parricide.⁵⁸ That is, Socrates specifies desires for acts which place one on an equal footing with the gods, an equal (incest) or superior (parricide) level to one's parents, and which lower the rest of humanity beneath one to the status of food. Such acts seem to be hostile to law not merely in the sense of violating some law but by attacking the very foundations of law. Cannibalism would undermine the sense of equality with other men in light of which it makes sense to follow universally applicable laws. Undermining the superior status of parents would remove the primary source of lawful rearing as indicated throughout book eight. Finally, placing oneself on a level with the gods reverses the order of lawful behavior as Socrates presents it at the end of book nine (589c7-d2). These acts do not seem to be desired merely for their own sake; rather, the desires seem to be precisely for acts which undermine the revered foundations of law. The dreamer wishes to place himself, at least in his imagination, or "as he supposes" (571d1), above the law, but to desire this means to retain some sense of the law's worthiness or high rank, for otherwise its transgression would not elevate.

A slight change Socrates makes in the conclusion to this opening discussion of dreams further supports the suggestion that the desires unleashed in dreams are dependent upon belief in the worthiness of law. Whereas Socrates began his discussion of these desires by referring to them as both unnecessary and "hostile to law" (*paranomoi*) (571b4-5), he concludes saying only that some "lawless" (*anomon*) form of desires is in

⁵⁸ See Adam (1902, 319-320); Benardete (1989, 206); Ludwig (2007, 229); and Scott (2007, 139).

everyone (572b4-5). Now the unnecessary desires were said to admit of removal (571b6-8), and this is a requirement for a desire to be classified as unnecessary (559a3), in which case Socrates cannot be sure that these hostile-to-law desires are in everyone. If Socrates has in fact indicated in the intervening discussion that some lawless desires are in everyone, then it would seem that even with the removal of those desires which are hostile to law, lawless desires of another sort remain. This, in turn, would be the case if the desires hostile to law were dependent upon law such that they present a constant temptation to all who have some belief in the law's exalted status (which explains why they are so widespread), for, in this case, the removal of such hostility to law would entail freedom from the law.⁵⁹

Returning to the tyrannic man and his eros, the opinions associated with the desires released in dreams take hold of his soul in waking life (574d5-e3). Whereas Socrates had earlier suggested no purpose which would limit or qualify the desires of the dreamer, here Socrates says the tyrannic man will stop at nothing which nourishes or supports (*threpsei*) his eros, limiting the scope of criminality to the needs of eros. The acts specifically attributed to dreamers however, would be of little use in terms of providing wealth for the tyrannic lover's exploits, unlike his previous crimes (cf. 574a3-d5). This is perhaps the reason Socrates does not mention desire so much as opinion in this context, for, along with the opinion of the goodness of the acts desired, the tyrannic man would also have opinions about himself as the sort of man who could commit such acts, and it is perhaps these opinions, rather than the desire to commit such acts which

⁵⁹ Note that reason is ultimately necessary, in addition to better desires and legal restraint, for removing the desires hostile to law (571b6-7).

most serves as a bodyguard for eros. Recalling that madness too had served as a bodyguard, we may suggest that it is the belief in one's superiority to law which makes these opinions a good bodyguard. Madness brought with it the hope to be able to rule over gods, and, if we follow Socrates' corrected suggestion from the end of book nine, that noble lawful things cause obedience to the divine (589c7-d2), hostility to law then appears as a necessary manifestation of the attempt to convince oneself of one's ability to rule over gods. Of course such violations of the law, real or imagined, prepare one to rule gods only in one's imagination, but by referring us to the opinions and desires satisfied in dreams, Socrates has indicated precisely the propensity to take satisfaction in merely imagined achievements. We therefore need not believe that the tyrannic man consciously affirms, with a clear understanding of what he affirms, his ability to rule gods; rather, it seems that the tyrannic individual may live in something of a dreamlike state, the pleasure of which consists in his feeling as if he could rule gods, yet never making the hopes implied by this feeling entirely explicit to himself.

Socrates' description of the tyrannic man's corruption by eros thus concludes by pointing us towards his eros' need for complete hostility to law as a bodyguard, a bodyguard which could protect eros by helping maintain the mad hope to be able to rule gods, which eros both unleashed and needs for protection. Why should eros need such protection? In our interpretation of book five's sexual legislation, we saw that the eros of decent men comes with the more or less explicit hope for divine assistance. That hope was linked to the decent men's sense of the worthiness of the law or virtue (see pages 54-56 above) and thus to the devotion to virtue on the part of the decent. In a man raised by

a democratic father, such devotion to virtue must be extremely weak (for any fully conscious admission of it would entail awareness of its opposition to the democratic equality of desires). When eros is aroused in such a man, his ability to support his eros with hopes for divine assistance based on devotion to virtue must be extremely attenuated. While the notion of meriting the needed assistance through desert may seem incredible to one so removed from serious and consistent concern with virtue, he apparently retains deeply buried beliefs in virtue and gods,⁶⁰ and the lover may thus be driven to seek the needed assistance by rule over the gods. The *Republic* thus leads us to the link between divine hopes and eros in two kinds of lover: the decent man whose devotion to virtue permits him to hope for divine aid and the tyrannic man who madly seeks to take it. An account of eros which further clarifies the way falling in love is intertwined with divine hopes may have to wait for the fuller treatments of the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, but we turn to these works bearing in mind the *Republic's* suggestion.

Chapter One Conclusion: Eros, Pleasure, and Painlessness

Some further confirmation of the connection between eros and religious hopes is provided by turning now to Socrates' final argument against the unjust life in book nine, an argument which criticizes the lives of all non-philosophers alike (583b3-5, 584e7-9, 586e4-587a1) and which Socrates says is most decisive (583b6-7). Here, Socrates

⁶⁰ In this connection, see also 578a10-12, where Socrates indicates that no one mourns more than the tyrannic man.

indicates a desire shared by all non-philosophers, law-abiding and tyrannic alike, which renders hope for divine assistance necessary, and he connects this desire to eros. The basic contention of this argument is that the pleasures of the non-philosophers are false pleasures (583b3-6). It is unclear to Glaucon (583b8), however, and probably also to us, what the application of falsity to pleasure might mean, and Socrates' explanation is largely misleading. Socrates alleges that what the non-philosophers believe to be pleasure is false in that it is not pleasure at all, but he points more subtly to false beliefs on which these pleasures depend.

Socrates responds to Glaucon's question as to what it means for the non-philosophers to have false pleasures by saying, "you answering and *me* seeking at the same time, *I* will find out" (583c1). Socrates thus suggests that his interrogation of Glaucon itself shows the meaning of the falsity of the non-philosopher's pleasures. Glaucon's ready acceptance at the conclusion of the discussion of the claim that the superior pleasures are those connected with unchanging things (585b12-e5), and his willingness to disparage pleasures mixed with pains (586b7-8 with c6), may thus provide a dramatic portrayal of a non-philosopher's desires. This possibility is confirmed by analysis of the argument.

Socrates begins by attaining Glaucon's agreement that pleasure (*hedone*) is the opposite of pain and that there is a state of repose between enjoyment (*chairein*) and pain, which is neither of the two (583c3-9). Socrates does not here claim that repose, although not enjoyment, is not pleasant (*hedone*), and in his subsequent remarks he allows a difference between pleasure and enjoyment, at least in thought, by noting that those who

are suffering call repose from pain rather than enjoyment (*chairein*) most pleasant (*hediston*) (583d7-9). Thus, Socrates' conclusion that those who affirm the pleasantness of repose err (583e7-8, 584a4-10), a conclusion upon which his claim that the non-philosophers' pleasures are simply false would seem to depend, is invalid, as his alternation of *hedone* and *chairein* indicates. Before drawing this unfounded conclusion, Socrates calls attention to the tendency of those suffering to claim that repose from pain is most pleasant (583c13-d11), and he further suggests that the repose from pleasure would be painful (583e1-2). While Glaucon readily agrees to the former suggestion (583d2, 5, 10-11), he responds with doubt to the later (583e3), and Socrates seems to share this doubt as his failure to offer examples or claim that this would seem most painful suggests (contrast 583e1-2 with 583c13-d1, d3-4, 6-9). It is then these indications of the great pleasure found in the relief from pain and the relative lack of pain in the cessation of pleasure, rather than his explicit conclusion, that seem to be Socrates' serious point in this first argument.

Socrates then adds a second argument, saying that the pleasant and painful are both kinds of motion in the soul, but "what is neither painful nor pleasant" is repose, and therefore it is neither pleasant nor painful (583e9-584a6). Socrates thus presents the argument in such a way as to prove nothing, for Socrates assumes what he needs to prove, beginning with a state that is neither painful nor pleasant, then classifying the state as repose, only to conclude that it is neither painful nor pleasant. On the other hand, calling pleasure and pain movements in the soul seems to mean that both involve a change in one's awareness, in which case the cessation of pain is just as much a change

as being in pain, as also the repeated recollection of a past state of pain by someone free of that pain would be. Thus, while appearing to argue for the opposite conclusion, Socrates helps indicate precisely how what is a state of repose in one respect might include the pleasant awareness of change in another respect. Furthermore, and perhaps most fundamentally, Socrates' suggestion that pleasure is a "motion" puts in question his later suggestion that the truest pleasures are those connected with and in what never changes (585b12-e4, see especially c1-3).⁶¹

Socrates has therefore not shown that relief from pain is not a pleasure, and, while it is true that he goes on to affirm the existence of some pleasures which do not depend on previous pains, the only example he offers, and he indicates it is an exemplary case, is that of pleasant smells (584b5-6). Such pleasures seem trivial when compared to relief from great pains, and Socrates notes this in the sequel, saying "yet the most and the greatest of the so-called pleasures stretching through the body to the soul are of this form: they are deliverances from pain" (584c4-7). There is no suggestion that the cessation of pleasure is equally painful. More importantly, Socrates has here characterized human life as one in which suffering must be sufficiently widespread and intense to make people seek relief as their primary pleasure. Socrates then adds that the greatest anticipatory pleasures *and pains* are those of the expectation of the cessation of their opposite (584c9-

⁶¹ This suggestion is suspect for other reasons as well. Socrates introduces here the idea of an immortal soul or mind with no prior preparation (585b12-c5), and with no explanation of how a mind, which because of its connection with what is always the same must itself be always the same (585c4-5), can change from a state of ignorance to knowledge. Furthermore, Socrates' argument includes the odd and apparently unnecessary claim that "the being of what is always the same" shares in "being no more than in knowledge" (585c7-8), which implies that if no such unchanging being is known, it does not exist. Regarding this last point, contrast Ferrari (2002); Ferrari, assuming that the "undisputed aim of the argument at 585b-e is to show that satisfaction of the soul is superior to bodily satisfaction," finds himself forced to emend the text, because otherwise, on his reading, the sentence in question is "simply not relevant" (2002, 384).

11), and here Socrates has dropped the pretense of calling these “so-called” (*legomenai*) pleasures (contrast 584c5 with c10). Pain so pervades our lives that what delights us most in anticipation is the thought of its relief. Furthermore, among the anticipatory pains, the expectation of the cessation of pleasure is greatest, whereas the actual cessation is not so painful. With this consideration it becomes clearer why relief from pain must be so widely sought, for, regardless of our circumstances, we all must anticipate one most complete and seemingly inescapable cessation of our pleasures in the anticipation of death.⁶² By Socrates’ account, awareness of our mortality must be a very great pain, and, for this reason, hopes which provide some relief from this pain will be very significant pleasures.

Socrates now offers an image for the mistake the non-philosophers make regarding what they consider pleasant, and his interpretation of the image helps confirm the above analysis. Socrates compares the popular attitude towards pleasure to that of a man from the bottom of the world who is brought to the middle, which he mistakes, out of lack of experience, for the top (584d1-e5). This image by itself suggests Socrates’ misleading claim that the non-philosophers mistake a repose from pain, which is between pleasure and pain, for the true pleasures, but in Socrates’ explanation of the image he makes some changes and offers a new image. First, when a man is brought from pain to relief, Socrates says he supposes only that he is nearing fulfillment, not that he has

⁶² If Socrates’ suggestion that the greatest anticipatory pains arise from the cessation of pleasure is not to be taken strictly, which his indication that the actual cessation of pleasure is not so painful may suggest, but rather as pointing to anticipation of the end of that on which all our pleasures depend, i.e., life, Socrates would also point to a desire for life apart from any consideration of its pleasantness. Such a desire would in turn explain why death is not typically desired as a relief from what Socrates’ describes as a fundamentally painful condition.

achieved it (585a2-3). The man does not simply mistake his relief for perfect bliss—no doubt in part because pains must still linger due to his doubts about the future—, rather he takes his relief to indicate the approach to bliss, which approach it would in fact be according to the first image. Secondly, Socrates says such men, out of inexperience of pleasure, look from pain to the painless, as if out of inexperience of white they looked from gray to black (585a3-5). Black is not an intermediate between grey and white, and thus the man is mistaken in his belief that in his repose he is nearing fulfillment because he is looking in the wrong direction. When the non-philosophers look from their painful condition to a state of painlessness they are looking towards an extreme state, a state opposite to that sought by the philosophers, and one whose spurious attractiveness entails denial of the necessity that pleasures be accompanied by pains (not least the pain of anticipating death). The pleasure of the non-philosophers thus differs from that of the philosophers in that the former find pleasure in the hope for relief from all pains, whereas the philosophers accept pain's necessity. In this case, the pleasures of the non-philosophers could be said to be false in light of their dependence upon false hopes and beliefs.

Finally, Socrates connects these false pleasures to eros. He portrays the life of the non-philosophers as a perpetual struggle, full of dissatisfaction (586b1-4), in which their pleasures, by contrast with pains, produce “raging loves (*erotas*) of themselves” (586c1-3). Socrates likens the objects of such love to phantoms of Helen, i.e., false images of beauty (586c4-5, cf. *Phdr.* 243a5-b1), and therefore the falsity of these pleasures seems to lie in particular in the loves they produce. Socrates' suggestion seems to be that man's

painful situation leads him to imbue these pleasures with a false beauty, which, in accordance with the above interpretation, is false in the hope that accompanies it, a hope which requires the assistance of the gods.

Book nine's contrast between the pleasures of the philosophers and everyone else, by suggesting that the non-philosophers seek a state free of pains and by connecting this wish to eros, confirms the suggestion we drew from our studies of the treatment of the eros of the decent in book five and that of the tyrannic individual in book ten that eros entails false religious beliefs, beliefs in gods who may provide one aid, not least in providing for one's immortality. The deepest aim of the communism of the family that Socrates proposes is not the unity of the city, as he alleges, but the destruction of the family. The destruction of the family is then consistent with Socrates' earlier endorsement of the guardians' self-sufficiency, for this self-sufficiency implied their independence from one another. But the guardians' self-sufficiency, in turn, is not sought to promote their virtue, as Socrates suggests, but rather it is sought for the sake of destroying those attachments among the guardians that prevent their holding to the theology necessary for philosophic rule, i.e., the rule of reason. Socrates' treatment of the eros in the tyrannic individual, in a different way, points to the same basic connection between eros and irrational religious belief. The tyrannic individual's eros leads and is protected by a state of madness in which he hopes to rule over gods. Now, while book nine's indication of the relentless suffering caused by anticipation of death indicates something of the need for religious belief, it does not explain how such beliefs come to

be. Furthermore, the most we have seen by way of explanation for the connection between eros and religious belief would seem to be the suggestion that the immense concern one feels for beloveds and children, the most common product of eros, is such as to provoke mourning in which religious hopes are felt. But this is not to explain why there is necessarily such a connection between eros and religious belief, for while it may be clear that those with religious beliefs will be given occasion to resort to and thereby strengthen those beliefs in times of mourning for lost loved ones, it is not yet clear why all lovers have such beliefs. That is, it is not yet clear why, as Socrates seems to think, the removal of eros and the family that goes with it would free the guardians from irrational religious belief. For this would seem to suggest not only that eros strengthens irrational religious belief through mourning, but also that eros is an important source of such belief. Our studies of the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* below will go some way toward explaining how and why eros is so connected to such religious belief.

Ch2: The *Phaedrus*' Praise and Blame of Eros

In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates makes two opposed speeches concerning eros. The first speech suggests that a beloved should gratify a non-lover rather than a lover and the second suggests that a lover should be preferred (cf. 243e-244a). Our primary task is to understand the teaching of each of these speeches about eros and to understand their relation to one another. Here, our theme is finally love proper; we are treated to numerous depictions of the experience of falling in love and the hopes and fears, both noble and base, which attend this experience. The eros depicted, despite being primarily pederastic eros, will remind us of romantic love as we see and feel it today. Thus, the reflections of chapter one regarding the conditions necessary for philosophic rule and the perverse eros of the tyrannic individual are nowhere near the surface of the *Phaedrus*. Nevertheless, through understanding Socrates' treatment of eros in this dialogue, we can begin to answer the questions raised at the conclusion of chapter one regarding the connection between eros and religious hopes.

Part One: Lysias' Speech

While our study of the *Phaedrus* concerns Socrates' praise and blame of eros, we must first turn to a speech which Phaedrus reads, Lysias' speech, which precedes both of Socrates' speeches. That Lysias' speech occurs in this dialogue, where the principle of logographic necessity, according to which there should be some necessity that the speeches on eros begin with that of Lysias, is most clearly articulated (264b3-c5), more

than suffices to justify beginning with Lysias, so as to ascertain the context in which Socrates presents his speeches. That Socrates himself, in this dialogue, demands of the artful rhetorician that he tailor his speech to his listener's soul (271d2-272a8); that Socrates' speeches should therefore be tailored to Phaedrus' soul; and that Phaedrus finds Lysias' speech so appealing (227d6-228a4, 234c6-7, d3-4, 235b1-5), heightens the demand to begin with Lysias. For only in this way can we discern that in Phaedrus' soul which is so delighted by Lysias' defense of a nonlover. To understand the way Lysias can attract Phaedrus to a nonlover and render lovers unattractive is to understand something of what Phaedrus desires and fears with regard to love. By understanding the persuasive power of Lysias' speech, we thereby understand something of Phaedrus' own view of eros, and it is by understanding this that we can assess how Socrates may have tailored his speeches to suit Phaedrus' soul.

Close scrutiny of Lysias' speech could seem to be rendered unnecessary by Socrates' denigrations of the speech: he suggests both the insufficiency of its content and its form (235a1-8, 262d8ff.). Yet, strictly read, Socrates' remarks actually motivate a closer study of Lysias' speech, not only because Socrates explicitly recommends such an examination (264e5-6), but also because Socrates' careful qualifications of his criticisms suggest the possibility that Lysias' speech has an important hidden structure. Socrates admits that Lysias' speech has "many patterns" which one would benefit from examining, and thus he seems to contradict his earlier suggestion that the speech lacks order (264b3-4). It is true that Socrates adds here that one would benefit by "not entirely undertaking to imitate" Lysias' patterns, but this hardly constitutes a complete rejection

of Lysias' rhetoric, and it may be readily explained by Socrates' suggestion that not even Lysias himself should continue his way of life writing such speeches in condemnation of eros (257b1-6, cf. 278b7-d1).

In Socrates' later and more sustained criticism of the speech,¹ he first appears to fault Lysias for failing to define eros at the beginning of his speech (263d7ff.), but then, by forcing Phaedrus to repeat the opening lines of Lysias' speech while adding one further line (cf. 262e1-4 with 263e6-264a3), Socrates shows that Lysias did "compel us to assume Eros is some one of the beings which he wished"² (263d8-e1), namely, the desire for another human being coupled with beneficence (cf. 264a2-3).³ The reason such a definition as accords with the common understanding of love is better left tacit becomes clear through reflection on Socrates' second criticism of Lysias' speech, that Lysias begins by discussing the end of the affair (264a4-b2), for during the affair the lover does offer benefits, to which Lysias would hardly wish to call attention by making this defining quality of love prominent in his attack on lovers. Finally, Socrates' makes his third criticism, that there is no apparent order in the speech, only while qualifying himself as incompetent and leaving it up to Phaedrus to decide the matter (264b3-8). Socrates thus allows that there is an order to Lysias' speech which differs from the order of his own first speech by virtue of being concealed from all but those competent in rhetoric. Whereas a perfectly clear order of argumentation following an explicit

¹ For Socrates' qualification of his earlier criticism see 234e9-235a1, 235a3-4. As he also does in his later criticism, Socrates' leaves it up to Phaedrus to determine the adequacy of Socrates' remarks; by doing so he can better gauge Phaedrus' attachment to the speech as a whole (cf. 235b1-5 with 234c6-7), and encourage Phaedrus to reexamine the speech.

² Note also that with this formulation Socrates is not clearly asking for an explicit definition and that he leaves the question without explicit answer.

³ See Seth Benardete (1991, 176); Ronna Burger (1980, 78).

definition may be of great value in teaching, as Socrates soon suggests (265d3-7), its usefulness for a rhetorical speech which seeks to persuade through false or unexamined claims is doubtful, for by its clarity it would expose its own weaknesses. It would therefore seem to be for this reason that Socrates' criticisms of Lysias' speech occur in that part of the *Phaedrus*' treatment of the art of speaking (262c5ff) which turns out to concern the principles of dialectic and not rhetoric (266b8-d2).

Socrates' first criticism is of the opening of Lysias' speech and he concludes his criticism by suggesting to Phaedrus that the opening and closing of his speech are interchangeable (264e1-2). Yet, if we compare the opening and closing a difference emerges: the beginning of the speech refers only to the mutual benefit the beloved and nonlover can receive from the affair (230e7), but the conclusion first exhorts the beloved to avoid all harm and then refers to mutual benefit (234c3-4). That Lysias turns from an appeal to benefits to an emphasis on the avoidance of harm makes sense, for, as we shall see, his speech proves much more capable of drawing attention to the dangers that attend affairs with lovers than showing the positive benefits to come from affairs with nonlovers. Following this introduction, Lysias then disguises his argument, and thereby his lack of arguments for the benefit of the affair, by presenting it through twelve apparently unconnected points or arguments.⁴ The following is my attempt to present a plausible account of the order of these arguments.

⁴ See Burger (1980, 23), where she notes Lysias' use of merely mechanical connectives to structure his speech, which allow its easy division into separate points (at 231a6, b7, c7, e3, 232a6, b5, e3, 233a4, c6, d5). Burger agrees with my claim that the speech has a concealed structure, but she seems to consider the large central portion of the speech a "loose enumeration" (ibid.).

The first two arguments belong together as they both contrast the former lover's view of the benefactions given during the affair with that of the nonlover. According to the first argument, lovers repent the benefactions they have given (231a2), and the second says they consider that they have adequately repaid the beloved with their benefactions (231b1-2). In both cases, the lover is inclined to stop giving to the beloved, but there is a tension between the two arguments, for the lovers of the first argument regret having given, whereas those of the second consider their gifts to have been justly given. This tension suggests the possibility of two groups of lovers, one more decent than the other, and therefore of one group which Lysias would not wish to make explicit but would rather leave in the shadow of the less decent. Lysias would still wish to make an argument against the beneficence of the more decent group, as the beloved is likely to be more or less aware of such decent lovers, and therefore, presenting only the first argument would be less completely persuasive.

While these first two arguments seem to argue for the superiority of the nonlover based on the material benefits he would offer, reading them together suggests that their force lies rather in the beloved's desire that the affection for him continue.⁵ In the first place, both arguments indicate that the nonlover will give to the beloved only what is in his own interest to give (231a5, b6-7). To the question of how much he is likely to want to give, the second argument makes clear that it will not be anything that costs him much—indeed, this is the very reason he will not consider that he has paid back the

⁵ Throughout my interpretation of Lysias' speech, I refer to its intended listener as the "beloved" despite the fact that he is allegedly not loved by the nonlover; disregarding the fact that the nonlover, if he is not altogether a liar, seems to be merely a rather lukewarm and calculating lover, the term "beloved" is appropriate, because the target of the speech is treated at least as if he has lovers (whom he ought to reject).

beloved (231b2-5). Furthermore, if the beloved were simply interested in being benefited, why would it be much of a deterrent that the former lovers will later regret their gifts? There is no indication that they would try to take them back. It seems therefore that Lysias' apparent appeal to benefit in fact relies upon the beloved's desire to continue to be loved.

Lysias' third argument, that, if lovers are most friendly to their beloveds, when they move on to a new beloved they will be more friendly to another (231b7-c5), continues to work on the beloved's desire for lasting love but now it is clear that this is also the desire to be loved exclusively or preeminently. The pain the beloved feels at the prospect of his lover now loving another is heightened by the argument's conclusion, that, since the lover, due to his surpassing friendliness, is most willing to be hated by others on behalf of his beloved, he will be willing to harm his former beloved if his new beloved wishes (231c2-7). Such willingness to harm, apart from the harm actually done, is likely quite painful as it reinforces the point that one is no longer loved. Furthermore, the desire on the part of the new beloved to harm the previous beloved is relevant only if it is rooted in the former beloved's having been loved by the new beloved's lover. The new beloved is likely to have such a desire, and such a desire is likely to be intelligible to the beloved to whom Lysias speaks, if, out of the desire to know that the lover loves him exclusively, the beloved is inclined to insist on his lover's harming past lovers as a sign of the end of his affection for them.

Of course, it is not as if the nonlover can offer stronger, more exclusive affection for the beloved; the nonlover must rather, and perhaps above all, lessen the beloved's

desire for such affection as lovers offer, for such affection is the distinctive contribution of love regardless of the lover's capacity to offer other benefits. Such an attack on the beloved's desire for affection only begins with the third argument, which arouses the beloved's fear at the painful prospect of losing his lover to another. By arousing the beloved's fear regarding the consequences of love, Lysias prepares or perhaps even inclines the beloved to hear the criticism offered of the character of the lover's affection in the next argument. This fourth argument seems a mere repetition of the first, arguing that, after the affair, the lover will regret his actions (231c7-d6), but the fourth adds the reason for this regret, by claiming that the former lover, thinking well again, will now view his love as misfortune, sickness, immoderation, and poor thinking (231d1-6). After arousing the beloved's fear regarding the end of his lover's affection, Lysias portrays the affection itself as sickness and vice. To present love as such is to lessen its attractiveness, but this implies that the beloved does not want such affection from the lover as comes at the expense of the mental health or virtue of the lover; that is, the beloved wants his lover's love to be good, for himself as well as for the lover. This fourth argument thus seeks to detach the beloved from his desire for being loved by relying on the beloved's concern for his lover, i.e., by relying on the beloved's concern for something more than mere personal benefit, a concern implied by his desire to be loved.

Thus it is only now, in the fifth argument, that Lysias argues that there is a greater chance of finding one worthy of friendship among nonlovers (because there are more of them), and asks the beloved himself to seek someone to whom he may offer his favors without regard to the recipient's having professed a desire for the favors or the beloved,

but only based on the potential friend's merit (231d6-e2). This merit is not explained in terms of benefits for the beloved. The criticism of the vice of the lover prepares the way for the appeal to the virtue or worth of the nonlover, which appeal makes at least some demand that the beloved be willing to give something of himself or put himself at risk, at the very least of rejection, for the sake of friendship with one who deserves it. This appeal has been facilitated by the previous argument's making the beloved somewhat aware both of his desire for virtuous healthy attachment and of what is implied in this desire, some concern of his own that puts aside his narrow self-interest.

The speech has thus progressed from arousing the beloved's fear of the end of his lover's affection to a criticism of the affection itself to a recommendation that the beloved himself seek a nonlover to gratify, but the speech has yet to make any argument on behalf of the speaker in particular. Such an appeal is coming (233a4-5), but we turn first to the beloved's concern with reputation, a concern which makes a fitting beginning for an argument leading up to the claim that the beloved should gratify one specific person, since gratifying all seemingly "worthy" nonlovers would necessarily damage the beloved's reputation, as the speaker ultimately makes explicit (234c2). Furthermore, a turn to the beloved's concern for reputation is especially needed at this point, because the fifth argument has just made the highly paradoxical and potentially risky suggestion that the beloved should seek someone among the nonlovers to gratify, and Lysias therefore now needs to show that the lovers are more risky for his reputation.

Thus the sixth and seventh arguments concern the nonlovers' superiority for the beloved's reputation. Like the first and second arguments which both pertain to the same

issue but which seem to treat different groups of lovers, these two arguments point to two different problems lovers pose for their beloved's reputation: the first argues that whereas nonlovers prefer what is best over reputation, lovers desire honor and will brag about their erotic successes (232a1-6); the second argument, which would be superfluous if all lovers were such braggarts, argues that many will see the lover with the beloved, and, having heard the lovers previously proclaim their love, will assume the couples to have recently been or be about to be engaged in their (sexual) desire (232a6-b2). Lysias, as in the first two arguments, seems to wish to point out the danger that attends coupling even with decent lovers without calling attention to the existence of such lovers.

Having aroused the beloved's fear for his reputation,⁶ Lysias now turns back to the question of lasting friendship, but this time he draws attention to the beloved's concern that the relationship last especially due to his having given away his sexual favors (232b5-c2). The beloved desires in particular that he not give up his favors for a mere fling. In turning to the beloved's concern with reputation, Lysias drew attention to the beloved's fear of having his sexual activity found out; awareness of this fear thus prepares the beloved to confront his fear of engaging in sexual activity itself. It is not that the beloved is opposed to sex—he makes most or much (*pleistou poiei*) of his favors, i.e., he takes great pride in them—but he desires the limitation of his sexual favors to lasting affairs and believes himself to have suffered a great loss if they are not so limited. One prominent reason that the beloved would believe he has lost much through

⁶ That fear on behalf of his reputation is not likely, at least in Lysias' view, to be an adequate argument against the beloved's gratifying a lover is also indicated in that, however much beloveds are like lovers in caring about their reputation, Lysias also believes that the nonlover's preference for what is "best" over reputation will appeal to beloveds (232a4-6).

promiscuity becomes clear within this very section of the speech, for Lysias now adduces the lover's fear that others will receive his beloved's favors, i.e., the lover's demand for exclusivity (232c4ff., cf. 234b6-c1), as the reason that friendship with a lover is more precarious. The failure of the friendship after providing sex thus leaves the beloved or his favors degraded in the eyes of potential lovers (234c1). Lysias therefore again confronts the beloved's desire to be loved, this time with the fear of losing his lovability.

As becomes clear, however, within this eighth argument, the nonlover does not place such import on the exclusivity of sexual favors as either the lover or beloved does, for, so far from fearing other associations, the nonlover encourages them, hoping to be benefited thereby (232d4-7). No argument is made that the nonlovers will know their partners better and therefore have more solid trust in them. Therefore, the nonlovers must be at least relatively unafraid of sharing their partners. In this case, it seems the lovers offer much more esteem for their beloved's favors, and Lysias would therefore want to lessen the beloved's desire to be loved for his favors. Lysias seems to do so by criticizing the value of the favors themselves, as he had earlier moved from arousing the beloved's fear regarding the cessation of love to a criticism of love itself. This begins to occur, if tacitly, in the next (ninth) argument.

Here, in again arguing for the greater security of friendship with nonlovers, Lysias argues that lovers often begin with desire for the body, and it is therefore unclear whether they will remain friends after their desire passes (232e3-6). Thus, after pointing to the danger lovers pose to the worth of the beloved's favors, Lysias points to the bodily character of those favors, and thus to their necessarily fleeting character, a character

which they have in the eyes of the nonlover as well (cf. 234a7-b1), and a character which he is now better prepared to admit. Lysias then concludes this section arguing that so long as the beloved chooses a nonlover from among his current friends, the cessation of sexual favors (presumably following the cessation of the nonlover's desire) will not harm the friendship (233a1-4).

The ninth argument thus requires that the beloved not be too bothered by the cessation of the nonlover's desire for his favors, i.e., by his no longer being found attractive, and the tenth argument continues this criticism of the worth of the favors, now not by pointing to their fleeting character, but by hinting at their being intrinsically worth less than is believed by lovers while in love. According to this argument, lovers are to be feared for the false praise and blame they confer, not only out of a desire to please the beloved, but also because love makes lovers "when unfortunate, believe grievous what furnishes no pain to the others, but when fortunate it compels the things not worthy of pleasure to meet with praise from them" (233a5-b5). Lysias does not specify the fortunes or misfortunes of lovers, but it is likely that failing to attain and attaining the favors of their beloveds would be among those pains and pleasures that others do not share.⁷ Lysias thus criticizes, if only by intimation, the lover's delight in his beloved and his accompanying praise as false or unmerited. Such a criticism undermines the beloved's desire to be delightful to his lover. Lysias' criticism is only effective if the beloved desires to be praised truly, but in this case, the praise is for the delight he provides the

⁷ Cf. the use of misfortune (*atuchesai*) at the opening of the speech (231a1).

lover, and thus Lysias works on the beloved's desire to be genuinely delightful to another by arguing that the delight of lovers is false.

In the place of such unmerited flattering and therefore potentially harmful treatment as the lover offers, Lysias now refers to the benefit which may come from a nonlover (233a4-5). It is notably only here that the speaker refers directly to himself within the speech (233a5, b6-c5). This turn to the first person is prepared by the ninth argument's limitation of the choice to one from among the beloved's current friends. More importantly, however, Lysias' purpose is not to persuade the beloved to seek all nonlovers but only one in particular, and therefore it is not surprising that it is at this point, where Lysias actually indicates a specific advantage that may come from gratifying this nonlover, true evaluations, that the nonlover refers to himself as the one capable of offering it.⁸ Beneficial as it may be to consort with one who offers truthful evaluations, Lysias evidently does not consider this benefit terribly attractive to the beloved, for, within this very section of the speech, he turns from this benefit, which he never even makes entirely explicit, to praise of the nonlover's self-mastery and victory over love, his patience, and the promise these provide for steady friendship (233b6-c6). Thus, in this argument, where the speaker refers to himself and the one benefit he clearly offers, his

⁸ Note the ambiguity in the speech's other references to benefits as to whether the nonlover is concerned to provide them for himself or for his partner (231a5-6, b6-7, 233c1). 234a2-3 is an exception, but again no indication is given of what goods the nonlover offers, and 234b4-5 quickly returns us to the selfish nonlover.

appeal is also to the virtue which facilitates this benefit and the strength this provides for friendship.⁹

Having now completed his criticisms of the love offered by lovers and the delight they take in their beloveds, those qualities with which a nonlover can least compete, Lysias has presented the nonlover as superior in terms of virtue and the endurance of friendship he offers. Precisely because the lover's attachment to the beloved has been so criticized, some question may have arisen regarding the strength of friendship which the nonlover can offer. This would in part explain Lysias' turn in his eleventh argument to examples of strong friendship without love (233c6-d4). Yet the beloved is likely to retain some doubt regarding the strength of friendship the nonlover may offer. The nonlover is already an associate or friend of some kind, but not a close friend, and the previous criticism of the lovers as well as the examples of friends—especially family members—who do not desire sex would hardly give the beloved the impression that gratifying the nonlover will make that friendship stronger¹⁰ (although he may be asked to believe that gratification will not harm the friendship, which may then grow stronger for other reasons). Thus, the eleventh argument makes a rather weak case. Perhaps it is also for this reason that Lysias only presents it after he has made his case against love, for then, frightened of lovers and somewhat disappointed in his hope to be the object of a good love, the beloved may be especially willing to look elsewhere for that strong friendship which had been among his attractions to love (cf. 231b7-c2).

⁹ At this point we should note that the previous four arguments each appeal to the nonlover's virtuous character (232a5), his friendship (232b3-4, 233a1-4), or both (232d4-5 with d7-e2). See especially the claim of argument eight that the nonlovers attain sexual favors "through virtue" (232d4-5).

¹⁰ Note also the third argument's complete omission of even the pretense on the part of nonlovers to offer strong friendship (cf. 231c1-2).

Lysias then makes one final argument in conclusion, which turns into something of a summing up of his whole argument. Lovers are compared to the poor, as those “most in need” of the beloved’s favors (233d5-8). Lysias admits that the lovers would be the most grateful recipients of the beloved’s favors but also the least capable of paying them back (233d8, e4, 6-7). Such a poverty on the part of the lovers, which is not restricted to the time after the affair, only makes sense if the beloved has accepted Lysias’ previous attempt to portray love as a mental illness, for in this case the lover’s need or love for the beloved is, as with material poverty, the very source of his inability to pay back his debts. The distance the speech has thereby traversed becomes somewhat visible by contrasting this final argument, which prominently admits the gratitude and goodwill of lovers for the beloved (233e5), with the begrudging image of lovers presented in the first argument. Lysias’ rhetoric, if it has worked, allows him to portray the good and attractive attributes of lovers as the mere consequence of their badness (sickness or vice).

The argument then concludes, turning from the lover’s poverty and the nonlover’s resources to a list juxtaposing the qualities of the lover to those of the nonlover, reiterating the main points of the speech (233e7-234b1). With the exception of the claim that nonlovers “will give a share of their good things to him when he becomes older” (234a2-3), the qualities of the nonlover mentioned indicate his relative safety for the beloved’s reputation, the enduring friendship he promises, and, ultimately, his virtue. This list then seems to confirm that the speech renders the nonlover attractive not primarily through appealing to the beloved’s mere self-interest, but rather by appealing to his desire for friendship and his admiration of virtue. Lysias then adds one further

remark, which confirms this suggestion, before making his concluding request: he tells the beloved to “lay to heart (*enthumou*) that friends admonish lovers that the practice is a bad one, whereas for nonlovers no one of their kin has ever blamed them for deliberating badly about themselves” (234b2-5). Lysias expects the goodness of non-love for the nonlover and the badness of love, which primarily means, because the friend of the lover would be primarily concerned with his friend’s interest, the badness of love for the lover, to be a compelling reason for the beloved’s preference for the nonlover. It is then the beloved’s concern with the interest of others, his concern that his friendships be mutually rewarding, and his desire to be with or even reward the virtuous (cf. especially 232d4-5), to which Lysias appeals in his argument for the nonlover.

Lysias’ speech appeals to the beloved’s self-interest as well as to his concern for friendship and his admiration of virtue. The above analysis suggests an order behind these seemingly haphazard appeals: Lysias masks an appeal to the beloved’s concern for others with an appeal to the beloved’s self-interest. The necessity which would compel such speech writing (cf. 264b7) would then be rooted in the beloved’s desire to be loved, which Lysias must attack in order to endorse an affair with a nonlover. Lysias does not wish to attack the desire to be loved directly, without preparation, and he therefore begins by appealing to the beloved’s interest, especially his fear of the harm that may come from lovers, and only subsequently subjects love itself to criticism. The criticism of love itself depends on the beloved’s desire that love be good for both lover and beloved. By arguing that love cannot be mutually beneficial, Lysias weakens the beloved’s desire to be loved which must be left unfulfilled by the nonlover. Now merely criticizing love and

offering steady friendship would not suffice to explain why the beloved should gratify the nonlover. Thus we see the second advantage of drawing attention to the beloved's desire that his lover's love be good, for this implies the beloved's concern for his lover, and, by arousing some awareness of his concern for others, Lysias prepares the beloved to hear the call to gratify the lover for his virtue. Lysias' praise of the nonlover must make him the object of something like the beloved's love if it is to have the desired effect, and praise of the nonlover's virtue is used to achieve this effect.¹¹ Finally, noting Lysias' need to present the nonlover as virtuous, we see a second advantage to masking the argument with an appeal to self-interest. By beginning only with an appeal to the beloved's self-interest, Lysias permits himself to present the nonlover's rational selfishness as a good or at least neutral quality which he may subsequently, through contrast with the immoderation of love, present as the virtue of moderation or self-mastery, and thus as something worthy of gratification.

The central theme or problem of Lysias' speech may then be said to be that of the relation between self-interest and concern for virtue or others. Lysias' masking of an appeal based on the beloved's concern for virtue and other human beings in an appeal to self-interest shows that the appeal of self-interest, on its own, is insufficient to attract a beloved to a non-lover. In our study of Socrates' speeches below, especially his *palinode*, we shall see much that helps explain why a beloved, or anyone else, would be attracted by something more than his self-interest. But the fact that the appeal to virtue

¹¹ Perhaps this, that Lysias' defense of a nonlover aims at turning the nonlover into a beloved, is what Socrates means when he suggests that the earlier love poets, who praised their beloveds, surpassed Lysias (235c2-d3). See Benardete (1991, 118). Cf. 255e2-3, where Socrates describes the desire to reciprocate love as nearly the same as love.

and concern for others may be successfully masked, at least when Phaedrus is the audience, with an appeal to self-interest, shows also that we are not simply attracted by the concern for virtue and the good of others; something in us may be attracted to a speech which appears to endorse concerning ourselves only with our self-interest. Furthermore, even though we are motivated by more than our own interest, there is an appeal to thinking our motivation is solely self-interest. As we shall see in our interpretation of Socrates' first speech below, Phaedrus' concern about what eros may require of him, even if he is the beloved, is an important source of the appeal of Lysias' speech; Phaedrus is attracted by a view which permits him to overlook or misinterpret his concern with something more than his own self-interest.

Part Two: Socrates' First Speech

Turning now to Socrates' first speech, the contrast between Socrates' depiction of the lover, which emphasizes above all his lack of goodwill for the beloved (239a1-2, 4-7, e3-5, especially 241d1), and that of Lysias', which begins by conceding the lover's goodwill,¹² is glaring. By arguing that the lover's immoderation has the effect of thoroughly eliminating goodwill (238e2-239a2), Socrates can offer a much more thorough condemnation of lovers than could Lysias. Yet, as I have argued, Lysias' rhetorical purpose is served by his initial admission of the lover's goodwill, and therefore we expect Socrates to pay a rhetorical price for his harsher depiction of lovers. It seems that he pays such a price. As Phaedrus points out (241d4-6), Socrates can offer no praise for the nonlover such as to inspire a beloved's attraction, whereas Lysias, by pointing out the lover's goodwill and its defects, arouses the beloved's desire for such goodwill and an awareness of his own goodwill towards potential suitors, which in turn prepares the beloved to feel love or some approximation of it for the nonlover. Indeed, to judge by Phaedrus' responses—and after all he is the audience—Socrates' first speech is rhetorically the least successful of the dialogue (contrast 227d6-228a4, 234c6-7, d3-4, 235b1-5 with 241d4-6 and 257c1-4).

Socrates' rhetorical failing, however, need not be taken as a failing of his speech, unless we assume that it is Socrates' purpose merely to surpass Lysias in rhetorical artistry or persuade Phaedrus of a perverse thesis. That Socrates has no intention of so

¹² Recall also that Socrates' will draw attention to precisely this aspect of Lysias' speech in what he asks Phaedrus to reread (cf. 262e1-4 with 263e6-264a3 and p. 88 above).

competing is suggested by his comment, at the outset of the speech, that the speech will make Phaedrus' comrade, who earlier seemed wise to Phaedrus, now seem more so (237a10-b1), for Lysias seemed wise to Phaedrus in terms of his rhetorical competence (228a1-2), and Socrates' rhetorical failure would only serve to heighten that appearance of competence. What then is Socrates' intention? Socrates' denial of the lover's goodwill amounts to denying what had been the implied distinction of the lover according to Lysias, and thus Socrates' condemnation of the lover amounts to a condemnation of Lysias' nonlover as a nonlover. That is, the basic claim of Lysias' speech had been that sex was preferable with one who lacks eros, because he lacks eros, and eros was distinguished by goodwill; now, Socrates shows that sex with one lacking goodwill (a Lysian nonlover) means sex with a dangerous predator (cf. 241d1).¹³ Thus, rather than competing with Lysias in the task of persuasion, Socrates exposes the basic error of Lysias' position.

In this way, we can understand not only Socrates' failure to offer praise of the nonlover, but also his suggestion of the disgusting unpleasantness of sexually gratifying an older man (240d4-e2)—which undermines the nonlover's chances of success as much as those of the lover—as well as his treatment of friendship and virtue.¹⁴ Friendship had been among the chief concerns of the beloved upon which Lysias relied, but Socrates now first reduces the status of friendship to that of a possession (239e2-240a2), thus

¹³ The predatory aspect of the nonlover is of course moderated in Lysias' speech, because the speech is given by something of a friend who offers friendship, and Lysias' speech is, today, all too easily imagined as coming from a relatively unerotic but sexually attracted friend who would limit the harm he inflicts on his partner. But insofar as such a friend feels goodwill along with his sexual attraction he blurs the distinction between himself and the lover and to this extent deviates from the speech's defense of the nonlover.

¹⁴ See also Griswold (1986, 57-58); Benardete (1991, 120).

ignoring the role of the beloved's goodwill in friendship,¹⁵ and then Socrates claims that friendship belongs only to those of the same age (240c1-3), thus rendering an appeal to friendship with the nonlover impossible. Regarding the virtue of the nonlover, the opening of Socrates' speech follows Lysias' in appealing to his moderation (237e2-3), but the second part then appeals primarily to manly virtues (238d8, 239a2-3, a7-b3, c5-d7), which may characterize lovers (239c1-2), notably omitting moderation (cf. 239a2-3).¹⁶ Finally, the preface Socrates provides for his first speech—the story of a concealed lover speaking to his beloved (237b1-6)—may be taken as confirmation that Socrates does not aim at offering a persuasive speech but rather seeks to show the error of Lysias'. For through this preface Socrates not only distances himself from his speech's argument, but also presents the truth, that Lysias' nonlover is some kind of concealed lover. We may then understand Socrates' later comment, according to which Lysias is “father of the speech” (257b2), as highlighting Lysias' responsibility for the corrupt view of love Socrates now articulates.

Socrates' suggestion of Lysias' influence on the speech is, however, overshadowed by his attribution of the speech to Phaedrus, whom Socrates not only credits for influencing (238d5, 241e4) and compelling his speech (238a9, 242d4-5), but also twice simply credits as its author, calling it “Phaedrus' speech” (242d11, 244a1), spoken by Phaedrus through Socrates' mouth (242e1). Socrates wishes to show the error of Lysias' speech, but he does this primarily for Phaedrus' sake, and thus his primary

¹⁵ Note, however, that the second of three qualities attributed to friendship is unsurpassed goodwill (*eunoustaton*) (239e4): the speech quietly indicates what its argument overlooks.

¹⁶ See Benardete (1991, 124), Burger (1980, 37). Socrates' treatment of moderation in this speech will receive further discussion below.

goal is to instruct Phaedrus. Such a goal may be facilitated by a speech which Socrates suggests is an expression of Phaedrus, if Socrates wishes to show Phaedrus something about himself. Having seen that Socrates' first speech, despite its apparent agreement with Lysias', contains the tacit rejection of Lysias' argument, we expect that Socrates will present those views of Phaedrus which led to his attraction to Lysias' speech in such a way as to indicate their shortcomings.

Socrates begins by veiling himself (237a4-5) and invoking the Muses (237a7), thereby further distancing himself from the substance of his speech. Socrates' self-concealment, which leaves his words emanating without an apparent source, and his invocation of the Muses give the impression that the speech is divinely inspired.¹⁷ But the very act of veiling himself, as an expression of his shame (237a5), a shame which Socrates will explain after the fact as rooted in his awareness of the speech's false presentation of love (243b4-7),¹⁸ betrays his self-possession in giving the speech.¹⁹ Furthermore, while Socrates attributes divine influence over the speech to other divinities, as we shall have to discuss below, he never credits the Muses, suggesting that he does not take his invocation to be effective. Socrates' subsequent remarks about the Muses, according to which they are the divine source of poetic madness (245a1-5, 265b4), makes their invocation a fitting preparation for the story (*muthos*) Socrates will now tell (237a9), but Socrates most sustained discussion of the Muses suggests that his invocation of them here is also something of a warning.

¹⁷ See Griswold (1986, 55). Cf. Socrates' later suggestion that the first prophetic speeches came from an oak tree (275b5-6).

¹⁸ See Sallis (1975, 123).

¹⁹ See Griswold (1986, 56).

That is, in his most sustained treatment of the Muses, Socrates tells another story, that of the cicadas, in which the Muses have the effect of turning those who most enjoy their music into cicadas (258e6-259d8).²⁰ When the Muses and music came to be, some were so stricken with pleasure that they lost concern for eating and drinking and thereby died without noticing their death (259b7-c2).²¹ The Muses' song thus offers great pleasure, including that of freedom from the painful concern with one's mortality, but this pleasure comes at the price of distracting one from taking care of oneself and ultimately death. The Muses then, as compensation for their first victims, rewarded them by turning them into cicadas who could sing their whole lives without need of nourishment and then, upon dying, report to the Muses those humans who honor them (259c2-6). The cicadas, the servants of the Muses, also sing a bewitching song (258e7, 259a3),²² and this song again indicates the dangerous character of music inspiration, for Socrates indicates that it is by resisting its bewitchment that one properly honors the Muses (259a6-b1, d7-8).²³ In his invocation of the Muses, Socrates suggests that they may have received their name for the clarity of their song but he leaves this an open question (237b7-9); considering his later story of cicadas and the manifest clarity of presentation of the speech (cf. 265d6-7), Socrates' invocation of the muses may serve as warning, above all to Phaedrus, who as Socrates notes is a music lover (259b5), not to be

²⁰ Burger notes the "anti-erotic" character of the Muses, describing them as those "who punish their own lovers with death and grant favors only to those who do not succumb to their charms" (1980, 35).

²¹ Socrates tells this story in response to Phaedrus' suggestion that life should be lived for pleasures without preceding pains (258e1-5); cf. pgs. 78-83 above.

²² The bewitchment depends on "idleness of thought" (259a3-4); cf. my treatment of Socrates' view of idleness in the *Republic*, especially pages 27, 54-56, 72-73 above.

²³ Socrates here includes among the Muses, Muses concerned both with erotic matters and philosophy (259d1-7), whereas he later gives the Muses credit only for poetry, attributing erotic madness to Aphrodite and Eros (265b4-5). Perhaps Socrates only means that love and the speeches of philosophy (cf. 259d6) offer the same dangerous bewitchment as music proper.

seduced by the speech's clear surface but to attentively look beneath it. This of course presumes that Socrates expects or hopes that Phaedrus will reconsider the day's speeches, just as he instructs Phaedrus to do regarding Lysias' speech (see pages 87-89 above).

The speech's apparent clarity is on display as soon as Socrates has put it in the mouth of a concealed lover, who begins with a reflection on the order the speech is to follow. The concealed lover asserts that there is one proper beginning or rule (*arche*) for deliberation, namely, to know first what the deliberation is about (237b7-c1). Such advice could seem too obvious to need stating, but the speaker indicates its necessity by noting that "the many" begin their deliberations without such knowledge and, unaware of its lack, proceed to disagree with each other and themselves (237c2-5). That is, the members of "the many" hold opinions which contradict those of others as well as their own, and they are unaware of holding such contradictory opinions. The speech thus begins by suggesting an approach which is called for due to the problematic status of opinions, thus presenting in advance a cautionary notice for its subsequent reliance upon opinion in its defense of moderation (cf. 237d6-c4). Furthermore, the many are unaware of the ignorance implied by their self-contradictions, and this observation then raises the question, which the speech nowhere explicitly takes up, of the source of the many's ignorance. In the dialogue's later discussion of the rhetorical art, Socrates asserts that to speak by art one must "first" grasp the character of those things in regard to which "it is necessary" that the many contradict themselves (263b6-9), and only subsequently does an artful speaker turn to defining (263c3ff.). To grasp the character of the class of things about which it is necessary that the many contradict themselves implies understanding the

cause of their ignorance (otherwise the necessity would be unknown), and thus we may expect the concealed lover's failure to answer this question to lead to a failure in his definition, as the definition may proceed without adequate attention to contradictory understandings of the definition's terms. Indeed, as the concealed lover further spells out the procedure, he indicates that in order to decide their question, whether lover or nonlover should be chosen, they will first define love, and then discern its benefit or harm (237c6-d3). The speaker thus tacitly assumes that whereas love is in need of an initial investigation, the good is sufficiently clear, but the good is, at the least, preeminent among the terms about which the many contradict themselves (cf. 263a9-11), and, as we shall see, the failure to first investigate the good renders the attempt to define love inadequate.

Before turning to the attempt to define love, we should note one further feature of the opening discussion of procedure, which further suggests the inadequacy of the speech to come while indicating a reason for such inadequacy. The concealed lover begins by noting the need for "knowledge" of what is to be discussed (237c1), but then, having linked knowledge to agreement by noting the disagreements attending the many's ignorance (237c2-5), he concludes by suggesting only that he and his beloved come to an agreement, setting down a definition of love (237c8-d1). As Socrates will note later, however, following an agreed upon definition allows one to "make clear what one wishes to teach about," speaking clearly and consistently, without necessarily speaking the truth (265d4-7). If the speech begins with an inadequate definition, one set down by agreement but not known to be true, what will it clearly teach? The consequences

following from the initial agreement—i.e., the speech will articulate the full consequences of the opinions of those who agree with its beginning. Now, despite the emphasis on coming to an agreement, the concealed lover engages in no dialogue with the beloved, and therefore we cannot rely on the speech to indicate the character of the beloved whose views are thus expressed. If then, we take Phaedrus, as the audience, to stand for the beloved, as Socrates later implies he does (243e4-6), the concealed lover's emphasis on agreement can be taken to indicate that the view articulated is that of Phaedrus. Socrates presents as consistently as possible Phaedrus' view so as to teach him its inadequacy. We may then in this way understand more precisely the manner in which and the reason for which he presents what he will call the speech of Phaedrus (see pages 105-106 above).

The attempt to define love begins by noting that love belongs to the class of desires and linking love to the desire for beautiful things or human beings, but the speaker then notes that nonlovers also desire these beauties (237d3-5). If one allows beauty or the beautiful things (*tōn kalōn*) their full range of meanings and takes love or eros in its ordinary sense as pertaining to a kind of sexual desire, the distinction between love in particular and desire for beautiful things in general is obvious, but the concealed lover's whole argument requires that he imply the more questionable claim that nonlovers desire beautiful human bodies.²⁴ The more likely distinction would have been between eros and *aphrodisia* (mere sexual lust) (cf. 254a7),²⁵ but by making this distinction, the

²⁴ One may wonder whether sexual desire divorced from any eros would include any care for beauty (cf. *Sym.* 206b7-e5 and 209b2-3 with 207c9-208b9 where beauty drops out of the account of eros, and Socrates is dissatisfied).

²⁵ Benardete draws attention to this distinction making a somewhat different point (1991, 122).

concealed lover would show the baseness of the nonlover's desire. He thus leaves it at both lovers and nonlovers desiring beauty and seeks a further criterion by which to differentiate lovers. He does so by arguing that in addition to natural desires for pleasure, we are also moved by acquired opinions which aim at the best (237d6-9), and he will distinguish love by arguing that it is desire for beauty in a distinct relation to opinion (238b7-c4). To do so, however, is to define love by its relation to what guides us towards the good, and therefore we can already see that the concealed lover will be incapable of defining love without asserting something about its goodness.

The concealed lover indicates four possible relations between opinion and desire: they can agree or be likeminded (*homonoeiton*); they can struggle against one another in faction; one can master the other; and the other can master the first (237d9-e2). The agreement of the two is called likeness of mind, which therefore implies that in states of faction we are of multiple minds, and thus the concealed lover would seem to hint that desires are not simply divorced from thoughts (or mind, *nous*) and that the conflict in the opinions of the many may have its root in conflicts between opinions of the good and desires. The latter two relations, in which one or the other masters (*kratei*) the other, would seem to be versions of factious struggle, for like-mindedness would not seem to admit or require one ruling the other. Now the rule of opinion will be called moderation (237e2-3), which serves the speaker as a standard against which to condemn eros, but if moderation is only one version of strife, it would seem inferior to a higher standard of like-mindedness. On the other hand, the concealed lover may mean or allow that when one ruling principle masters the other it does so so thoroughly that the ruled comes to

agree: i.e., opinion educates desire so one desires the good, or desire so deludes opinion that one believes bad pleasures to be good. The concealed lover would seem to leave this ambiguous, thus leaving the status of moderation unclear; we shall see that there are grounds for supposing the speech to consider two different forms of moderation.

However this may be, the triumph of opinion is called moderation and that of desire is hubris (237e2-238a1). Gluttony, excess with regard to wine, and love are presented as three forms of hubris which are condemned as immoderate (238a6-c4). Phaedrus' concern for health (cf. 227a4-6, 268a8-9), as well as the disdain for bodily pleasures which accompanies his desire for pleasures without pain (258e2-5), surely opposes gluttony, and, as we know from the *Symposium*, it opposed excessive drinking (*Sym.* 176d5-7). We can see then here how Socrates articulates Phaedrus' view, which had found the moderate nonlover of Lysias' speech so attractive. Difficulties emerge, however, if we examine the speech more closely.

Moderation is not simply defined as the rule of opinion but rather that of rational opinion (*doxes logoi*) leading towards the best (237e2-3). Hubris, we are told, has many names because it has many limbs and many forms (238a2-3). The speaker's emphasis is on the diversity of hubris; he suggests not only that there are multiple kinds of hubris but also limbs,²⁶ which implies each kind of hubris is part of one unified opposition to rational opinion. It is for this reason that he then says, "whichever class happens to become conspicuous" supplies the name for the one who has it (238a3-4), for this implies that the hubristic man has the other forms of hubris as well, but one in particular is

²⁶ Or parts, depending on which text one follows; the choice is between *polumeles* and *polumeres*, but either one implies a unified hubris which has the parts or limbs.

especially noticeable. The concealed lover thus points to hubris as the basic source of the many's ignorance, but he seems to leave its aim obscure. That is, what is sought in opposition to reason or the source of dissatisfaction with the goods offered by rational opinion is unclear, but it is unclear, it would seem, above all, because the concealed lover leaves the good, or the aim of rational opinion itself unclear.

The speaker does, however, quietly intimate his awareness of this failing. When providing different examples of hubris, the concealed lover names gluttony but then refers to excessive drinking without naming it, but calling some attention to the omission by saying its name is clear (238a6-b3). Shortly thereafter, he says, "what has been said is altogether clearer than what has not been said" (238b7),²⁷ and we must ask therefore why he left the name for excessive drinking unclear. The word for gluttony, *gastrimargia*, contains the word for stomach, *gaster*, and thereby points to the standard, bodily health, according to which one should eat, but excessive (wine) drinking is surely not related to thirst as gluttony is to eating, and while excessive drinkers may be easy enough to point out for practical purposes, it is much harder to say at what one should aim in consuming wine.²⁸ The speaker's omission of a name for excessive drinking thus points us towards the obscurity of the standard by which it is judged. As questionable as the standard is for proper drinking, that for the pursuit of beauty is surely as or more obscure, and the concealed lover quietly intimates this. Whereas the definition of gluttony accorded easily with that of moderation in that gluttonous desire was said to oppose the "reasoned

²⁷ If one takes the alternate reading, "what has been said is somehow clearer than what has not been said," the statement still raises the question of what has not been said.

²⁸ Cf. Benardete (1991, 122).

account” (*logou*) of the best (238a7), love is only said to oppose correct opinion (*doxes epi to orthon*)—there is no claim that such correct opinion or orthodoxy is rational (238b7-8).²⁹ The speaker thus quietly allows that such moderation as Phaedrus admires which opposes the erotic desire for beauty is not rational, although he certainly wishes to give the impression that eros is immoderate. In other words, moderation seems to be presented ambiguously: on the one hand there is a moderation whose rationality is uncertain which condemns eros as an excessive pursuit of pleasure; on the other hand moderation may be taken as rational, in which case its relation to eros is unclear.

There is a further difficulty with the definition of eros, which again points to the speech’s failure to adequately analyze the good, or the aim of reason. Love is said to be for the pleasure of beauty (238c1), but the speaker had just mentioned beauty as a quality which the name one receives for hubris will lack (238a5).³⁰ Such a use of the term “beauty” places it on the side of moderation against the hubristic desire for pleasures, and it therefore raises the questions of whether beauty is intrinsically good, such that its pursuit cannot be immoderate, and also of whether it is properly understood as kind or source of pleasure. The second part of the speech will offer further reasons to suggest that beauty is not properly understood as a source of pleasure. In this case, moderation too must be put in question, not only as to its standard and whether it in fact opposes eros,

²⁹ It is true that the definition of love refers to it as a desire without reason, but this does not necessitate that the opinion opposed to love be rational (I shall argue that Socrates presents in this speech both a rational and an irrational opposition to love). Furthermore, what is said to be without reason does not seem perfectly clear in the Greek. That is, the “without reason” (*aneu logou*) which would seem to modify desire is placed immediately before the reference to correct opinion, thus reading, “*aneu logou doxes...*” (238b7-8). I know of no rule in Greek according to which “without reason” could be proved not to modify “opinion”, and its placement immediately before the mention of correct opinion then certainly raises the question of the rationality of correct opinion. None of this is to deny that the concealed lover intends on the surface to imply that it is desire which lacks reason and that the opinion opposed to this desire is moderate.

³⁰ Cf. 237b7.

but also as to whether it is best understood in terms of the opposition between opinions of the good and desires for pleasure. The answers to such questions would again require what the concealed lover omitted, a prior investigation of the good and its relation to beauty and pleasure.

The definition of love thus presents eros as the desire for the pleasure of beauty which opposes correct opinion, being mightily strengthened by dominant desires for beautiful bodies (238a7-c4). If one regards the condemnation of eros as immoderate as questionable and qualifies the emphasis on pleasure, the definition looks like a tolerable definition of love:³¹ a strong desire for beauty coupled with and strengthened by desires for bodily beauty. There is one further difficulty, however, to which Socrates calls attention after offering this definition. After defining eros, Socrates interrupts the speech to call attention to his having suffered something divine (238c5-6). Phaedrus agrees, interpreting Socrates' divine suffering to be his "unusual fluency" (238c7-8). Socrates does not correct this interpretation, and if we look at the preceding, Socrates' unusual fluency would seem to have been exhibited above all in the playful etymologizing by which eros is associated with forcefulness (238c2-4). Socrates, however, does not seem to regard his divine suffering as unqualifiedly good, for he suggests he may soon be possessed by nymphs, and he seems to hope this may be avoided by the prompt completion of the speech (238d1-7). Indeed after, the speech, Socrates gives as a reason that he did not complete his assignment and praise the nonlover his fear of being

³¹ Consider Socrates' later emphasis on this one definition for his speech about love, where he is treating both speeches together as one (263d2-3 in context).

possessed by nymphs (241e3-5). Playful as his remarks about the nymphs may be,³² Socrates thus seems to indicate by them that we ought not to trust the nymphs' influence on the speech, and that his etymological connection of love with force may be problematic.

After the interruption, Socrates turns to the formal evaluation of the lover. This evaluation was to be based on the definition, but as the definition said nothing about the character of beauty, by which it specified the pleasures which love seeks, the definition is of little direct value in the evaluation. Furthermore, the principles of human behavior outlined in the first part of the speech are nowhere used to establish the various benefits or harms which may come from the lover. The evaluative portion of the speech therefore does not seem to be deduced from the prior definition. This further suggests that the process of definition was primarily a means for Socrates to raise questions about the character of moderation and its relation to eros, and furthermore, it suggests that Socrates' interruption served to conceal the absence of a necessary connection between the definition and the evaluation of love. Finally, the one point from the definition which seems to be carried over to the condemnation of love is the association of love with force, which Socrates established through his playful etymologies and called into question through his reference to nymphic possession. The association of love with force turns up in the evaluative part, as the concealed lover argues: that one ruled by desire as a lover is must do everything to make the beloved as pleasant as possible; that the lover is sick, and

³² Socrates refers both to the place and the nymphs as the source of his divine suffering, and we may perhaps explain this by saying Socrates spends the day in an unusual place, taking time off from his usual conversations (230c6-d5), and under such relaxing influences, responding to Phaedrus (cf. 238d5), who appreciates such stylistic flourishes, Socrates is led to speak in an unusual manner.

to the sick the weaker is always more pleasant; that therefore the lover will always seek to make the beloved weaker and worse (238e2-239a2). The lover is thus portrayed as compelled to seek nothing but domination of his beloved.³³ The difficulty with such a characterization of love comes out most clearly in the palinode, where eros is portrayed not only as spurring lovers on towards their beloveds but also restraining their pursuit and giving them goodwill towards their beloveds (254b5-255a1), but even in this first speech, the inadequacy of suggesting that lover's merely wish to dominate their beloveds, will become apparent as we proceed.

Because lovers are alleged to seek to make their beloveds as defective as possible (239a2), the lovers will seek to deprive their beloveds of all goods, and the speech therefore proceeds to detail the damage that would be done thereby. The various kinds of harm from lovers are clearly divided and the order of presentation is clear: the concealed lover indicates first the harm done to the intellect (239a2-c1); then he treats harm to the body (239c3-d7); and then harm to external possessions (239d8-240a9). The concealed lover next treats the unpleasantness of the lover, which, while strictly speaking irrelevant to a consideration of his harmfulness, surely renders the lover more unattractive, and its relative unimportance determines its placement after considerations of harm (240a10-e7). Finally, he turns to the harmfulness of lovers (for their beloveds) after their love has ceased (240e8-241c1), a point which Lysias had made primary but which is now put in its proper place as secondary to the harmful effects of love itself. Of the goods of which the lover will deprive the beloved three seem to be emphasized: philosophy (239b3-4),

³³ Cf. Benardete (1991, 124-125).

manliness (239a3, b2, c7, d4-7), and friendship (239e3-6). The speech gives no explicit indication of why these goods are emphasized or even why they are considered goods, but upon scrutiny it seems that they are goods especially problematic for a lover seeking to tyrannize his beloved,³⁴ and, at the same time, their status as goods implies a critique of such moderation as Phaedrus seems to admire, the moderation of the speech's first part whose rationality was questionable.

The coincidence of these two features of the goods in question is explained when we note that moderation, or one version of it, is compatible with the desires of the lover. In detailing the excellences or virtues of intellect of which the lover will deprive the beloved, the concealed lover names four: wisdom, courage, rhetorical skill, and wit (239a2-4). In such a listing of four virtues we might have expected justice and moderation in addition to wisdom and courage,³⁵ but apparently moderation and justice, or at least such moderation and justice as are separable from wisdom and courage, are not necessarily troublesome to the lover. Indeed, looking ahead to the description of the unpleasantness of lovers and their deeds after the affair, it becomes clear that to accept such a lover a beloved would need to have a sort of moderation of his desires for pleasure, insofar as he would have to endure unpleasantness for the (false) promise of

³⁴ Cf. *Symposium* 182b7-c4, where Pausanias notes that tyrannies oppose philosophy, eros, and exercise, because they fear proud thoughts and strong friendships. See also Benardete (1991, 124-126); the following account is much indebted to his observations regarding the opposition between moderation and manliness, although I do not necessarily follow his reasoning, nor do I interpret the speech as being about politics as he seems to do.

³⁵ See Burger (1980, 37); Benardete (1991, 124).

future rewards (cf. 240e9-241a2).³⁶ The beloved must be moderate in the sense of ruling his desires by opinions, although these opinions are evidently unreasonable; we shall call such moderation vulgar moderation, in light of its reliance upon mere opinion.

We must examine the details of what amounts to a criticism of vulgar moderation more closely. It is striking that the virtues of which the lover would deprive the beloved are now said to pertain to “intellect” (*dianoia*) as opposed soul, as will later be suggested (contrast 239a5 and c1 with 241c5), especially since this has the consequence of presenting courage as an intellectual virtue. To speak of soul as opposed to speaking of intellect by itself would seem to mean treating intellect as bound together with desire (cf. 246a6-7). Thus, the failure to mention soul here seems to accord with the prior denial of any connection between desire for beauty and the good of the intellect, for an understanding of beauty as something bound to the good of the intellect would presumably require an account of some interdependence of intellect and desire. That courage, which presumably pertains to the willingness or desire to face fears, is presented as a virtue of intellect alone and not as a disposition of intellect together with desire calls our attention to the inadequacy of the earlier dichotomy of opinion and desire on which the speech’s view of moderation is based.

Taking manliness as akin to courage (cf. 239c7-d1 with d4-7), the next portion of the treatment of harm to intellect, which focuses on the beloved’s loss of associations from which he might most become a “man” (*aner*), again calls our attention to the point

³⁶ To see the lover’s need for the beloved’s “justice”, compare the beloved’s expectation that lovers keep (harmful) oaths, an expectation on which he bases his gratification, with the view of oaths of the former lover who has intelligence (240e9-241b6).

made in the preceding paragraph regarding the restriction of such harm to the intellect while also explaining the lover's need to oppose such virtues. The concealed lover argues that the lover's jealousy will lead to his depriving the beloved of many associations, especially those beneficial ones which promote manliness, the greatest of which is that from which he would become most thoughtful (*phronimotatos*), divine philosophy (239a7-b4). Philosophy is thus linked to manliness, and, although this paradoxical³⁷ link is not explained, it seems connected to what the concealed lover next notes: that philosophy would lead to the lover's being despised, while the lover wishes the beloved to be ignorant and thus to "look toward" the lover in all matters (239b5-7). That is, wisdom is the key to independence and is at least in this sense manly. The lover, however, seeks complete obedience and thus must at all costs prevent the beloved's pursuit of wisdom. Such moderation then as would blindly obey acquired opinions is thus tacitly criticized in light of the standard of wisdom and courage or manliness.

If there is still some doubt that Phaedrus is here being criticized, the next part of the speech, detailing harm to the beloved's body, should put an end to it as clearly as could be desired. This section of the speech is conspicuously abbreviated, for the concealed lover claims that the harmful activities of the beloved are clear and not worth detailing (239d3), and he begins the next section saying "one must let this [previous subject] go *as* clear" (239d8), implying that the matter has not in fact been fully clarified. The speaker's conspicuous abbreviation points to his failure to name specific activities of the beloved, but if we ask why it is the activities of the beloved and not the lover that are

³⁷ Cf. *Gorgias* 485d3ff.; *Republic* 487d3-5.

primarily in question, we are directed to an even greater omission: the concealed lover here speaks only of the harmful bodily conditions of the beloved which attract the lover (239c5) and nowhere indicates explicitly how the lover harms the beloved. To be sure, we must take it as implied that the lover will encourage and seek to perpetuate the beloved's harmful activities, but the omission of this point means that this section is primarily an indictment of the beloved.

If we look then at the character of the indictment, its criticism of Phaedrus becomes unmistakable.³⁸ That is, in describing the beloved's softness and avoidance of manly toils, the concealed lover says the beloved will be "reared not in pure sunlight but under mixed shade" (239c6-8);³⁹ Phaedrus' desire for shade has already been indicated (229b1), and his concern for shade together with his avoidance of bright sunlight will become conspicuous shortly after the speech (242a3-6), just as his later suggestion that life should be lived for pleasures free from pains (258e1-4) confirms that he must seek to avoid manly toils which surely involve pain (239c7-8, d4-7). There is no contradiction between the suggestion that Phaedrus is soft and seeks to avoid pains and the suggestion that he believes in and exhibits a vulgar moderation which requires the acceptance of some pains, for as Phaedrus' very formulation of his desire for pleasures without pains indicates, he is aware of painful bodily needs, and it is the pleasures associated with these needs that he disparages (258e1-5). Phaedrus' desire to avoid pain leads him, under the guidance of medical professionals, to moderate his desires, thus exhibiting some

³⁸ Burger (1980, 37); Benardete (1991, 125).

³⁹ The beloved is also described as adorned with alien colors and adornments (239d1-2); this could be a reference to Phaedrus' carrying a book, which Socrates claims renders him attractive (227d2-5, 228d6-e2). Cf. 275a4, where books are described as "alien markings."

resistance to pain, so as to render life as painless as possible; he wishes above all to avoid living for, or viewing as highest, pleasures that are inseparable from pains. Socrates, here, with his appeals to manliness and criticisms of softness tries to arouse in Phaedrus a greater appreciation for toughness, while he omits here specific details of the beloved's activities so as to avoid too direct and therefore offensive a criticism of Phaedrus. Recalling the earlier indication of a connection between manliness and philosophy, it would seem that Socrates here implies that Phaedrus would need greater toughness also if he were to turn towards philosophy. Philosophy's need for such toughness may be explained if one considers the pain one would need to undergo to free oneself from opinions and attain the independence of wisdom.⁴⁰

The speech's appeal to manliness thus accords with its praise of philosophy and a criticism of Phaedrus with regard to both, but the appeal to manliness also criticizes Phaedrus' view of friendship. Much of Lysias' speech appealed to the beloved's concern for friendship, and Phaedrus appeared to share this concern (cf. 234e2). Now, Socrates will speak in glowing terms of friendship (239e3-4), but only after first indicating the need for manliness on the part of the good friend. Socrates concludes his treatment of bodily harm, saying that the beloved will have such a body as in times of war or other great distress gives enemies confidence and friends fear (239d4-7). A good friend must be manly in body if he is to help his friends, but, more importantly, if a friend is to be "most good-willed" (*eunoustaton*) towards his friends, as Socrates indicates he should be (239e4), he must have courage or the willingness to hazard great dangers and pains on his

⁴⁰ Consider also the lesson of the story of the cicadas, according to which one must resist their enchanting offer which includes a painless death (see pages 107-108 above).

friend's behalf in times of distress. Thus, the conclusion of the treatment of the body prepares the turn to the treatment of friendship (as the primary point of the discussion of external possessions), and Socrates' criticism of Phaedrus' unmanly or soft moderation implies a further criticism of his capacity for friendship. In extreme circumstances, Phaedrus' aversion to pain is at odds with his appreciation of friendship; Socrates wishes to strengthen the later while weakening the former, and, as we have suggested, by so doing Socrates may also bring Phaedrus closer to philosophy.

Phaedrus has now been criticized from the point of view of philosophy, manliness, and friendship, and the vulgar moderation to which he is attracted has been exposed as encouraging these deficiencies. Such deficiencies render Phaedrus susceptible to Lysias' rhetoric, which, by masking its appeal to his concerns for friendship and virtue with an appeal to self-interest that denies the need for sacrifice, would permit Phaedrus to ignore the dangers to himself that are implied by his concern for virtue and others. More generally, vulgar moderation in a beloved is conducive to a concealed lover's success. Thus the moderation by which love was condemned turns out to be a means to love's success, in which case vulgar moderation hardly seems an adequate standard by which to condemn love. Thus the speech now turns from a criticism of the moderation by which love was condemned to a quiet criticism of the initial characterization of lovers, which is called for now that the moderation which condemned eros has been shown to be deficient.

At the conclusion of his discussion of the lover's harm to property, the concealed lover notes that the lover will seek to deprive his beloved of wife, child, and household

for as long as possible, so as to have the beloved for himself as long as possible (240a6-8). Thus the concealed lover tacitly admits that lovers seek unending possession of their beloved, in which case it appears that love aims at more than mere bodily beauty. Next, in the discussion of the painfulness of lovers, it becomes clear that the lover's pursuit of beauty is hardly well understood as a simple pursuit of pleasure. The concealed lover argues that what is compulsory is painful for all involved, and his explicit point here is that the lover's compulsion to be with the beloved is unpleasant for the beloved (240c4ff.), but it is the lover here, as throughout the whole speech (238e3, 239a7, 239c4-5, 240a4), who is primarily under compulsion, and thus love, the alleged pursuit of pleasure, turns out to be an allegedly painful compulsion. Furthermore and more fundamentally, this painful compulsion is not simply painful but precisely where its pleasantness is indicated it seems to aim at something more than pleasure. For the lover, as the concealed lover now admits, perhaps counting on the repulsive picture he presents of an older man's sexual gratification to conceal the admission, is driven by necessity not only to pleurably perceive his beloved in every way, but also constantly, with pleasure, "to serve him closely" (240c6-d4). That is, the lover's desire for beauty compels his constant service of the beloved; it is true that this service is pleasant, but this also means that the lover pursues more than his own pleasure. It is now finally obvious that the lover's immoderate desire for beauty cannot require or permit the lover to seek to weaken his beloved in all respects so as to make him easier to possess, for the lover, as Lysias also admitted, seeks to benefit the beloved. We see here again the consequence of the initial failure to consider the relation between the attraction to the beautiful and the

concern for the good, most immediately, in this case the connection between beauty and the good of the beautiful beloved.

The speech has thus far presented both Phaedrus' view of moderation so as to subject it to criticism for its reliance on mere opinion and its related lack of wisdom, manliness, and due consideration of what is required by friendship, deficiencies rooted in Phaedrus' avoidance of pain, and it has indicated the deficiency of the speech's initial view of love, which was condemned by the standard of vulgar moderation. We may then connect Phaedrus' defective moderation to his defective view of love and beauty, for the desire for beauty is more than a mere desire for pleasure, as it entails service to another, and therefore, while such service is pleasant, it is certainly a mixed pleasure, including, at the least, the risk of some, perhaps very great, pains. As a pleasant compulsion to benefit another, love is a mixed or impure pleasure which, like philosophy, manliness, and friendship, requires the acceptance of pains as inextricably linked to the goods sought (cf. pages 107-108 and note 40 above). To show that love, like philosophy, manliness, and friendship is tied to pain in this way and that it is not adequately condemned by the standard of opinion is not, however, to show that love is in fact good. On this point the speech seems above all to leave Phaedrus or the reader with the question of the relation between beauty and the good as a question to ask of the teaching of the palinode.

Yet the speech's conclusion itself offers a disconcerting and unexplained answer: love is not simply good. After having quietly revised its presentation of lovers and accordingly now replacing the earlier mentions of harm to intellect with harm to the "education of soul" (241c5), the speech presents the former lover as better off as a result

of his no longer loving. Once the lover has “desisted from love” (240e8), i.e., not merely when the lover has fallen in love with a new beloved (cf. 241b1-3), the former lover has a new leader, intelligence (*nous*) and moderation instead of love and madness (241a3).⁴¹ Intelligence or rationality is now coupled with moderation, and thus we have a return to moderation as the speech originally defined it (cf. 237e2-3). This moderation seems to stand higher than the vulgar moderation which has been criticized, and the former lover regards it as such a gain that he is “compelled” to violate his past oaths to his beloved lest, by “doing the same things” as he did before,” irrationally serving the beloved, as we may infer, he may go back to being a lover (241a7-b4).⁴² The speaker could have rendered the former lover more unattractive by presenting him betraying his former beloved for a new one, as Lysias had done. Thus it seems the speaker has turned away from the attempt merely to condemn love as harshly as possible, and yet it seems he wishes to maintain a condemnation of lovers.

Perhaps, however, the condemnation has been softened, and love is no longer presented as simply bad; perhaps love, while itself mindless, has prepared the former lover for his acquisition of intelligence. The speaker claims that lovers are by necessity mindless (241b7), but he makes no claim that all nonlovers have intelligence, saying only

⁴¹ Note that the speech now introduces madness instead of hubris in its treatment of love. Perhaps the presentation of love here is meant somehow to accord with or prepare that of the palinode; perhaps hubris is not so opposed to intelligence as madness is.

⁴² The lover is said also to be influenced by shame (241a6-7). Out of shame he will not dare to say he has become other nor to uphold his past oaths, but the failure to uphold his oaths is explained subsequently as the result of a rational calculation (241b1-3), and thus the shame seems to apply especially to daring to say he “has become other.” It does not say that he does not dare to admit he was once a lover, but that he no longer is one. It seems that the former lover, while not considering love simply good, is aware of its power and feels shame at condemning it, as Socrates himself subsequently professes to do (243b4-7, d3-4). Socrates’ shame, in any event, is linked to his awareness of the divinity of Love, and thus we must wait until this divinity has been explained before we can offer an explanation of the shame.

that the nonlover who also (*kai*) has intelligence should be preferred (241c1), yet he does presume that the former lover has intelligence (241a3-4, b1). That one who loved has been freed from the grip of eros evidently is evidence enough that he has acquired intelligence, although we should note that the former lover is also not simply free from love—he must vigilantly guard against acting in such a way as to become a lover again (241b1-3). Since there may be other nonlovers who lack intelligence, we may wonder whether having loved offers some peculiar advantage for its attainment. The beloveds themselves seem to be examples of nonlovers who lack intelligence, as is evidenced by their incomprehension of their former lover’s intelligence and moderation (241a4-6, b5-c1). If we then look to Phaedrus as the example of or the stand-in for a beloved, we see someone opposed to love, a nonlover, whose lack of eros permits him to leave the character of beauty unexamined, and whose ignorance of his deficiencies in philosophy, manliness, and friendship, could perhaps be remedied by an improved awareness of beauty. We may contrast Phaedrus then with a former lover, who would presumably have a much greater awareness of beauty’s character and who is asserted to have intelligence. The former lover would be aware of beauty, and we may wonder further if it is because he has also somehow become aware of beauty’s relation to the good that he is able to be a former lover. In this case, he would have had to carry out what we indicated was missing from the concealed lover’s approach at the outset, an analysis of the standard, i.e., the good, and its relation to beauty. Having carried out such an analysis, the former lover would be prepared also to understand the “hubris” or “madness” which opposes the good aimed at by reason, which seemed to be the source of

the many's self-contradictions, and the awareness of which seemed to be necessary for rising above self-contradiction. In this way, finally, we may understand why the former lover, as a result of loving and ceasing to love has acquired intelligent or rational moderation. The speech therefore concludes by raising the possibility that intelligent moderation is accessible only or especially to former lovers, precisely because of their having loved, in which case love would be rational and a good, not unqualifiedly, but as the means to a higher, post-erotic moderation.

It is difficult to determine at this point how to assess the indications about eros that we have discerned in this first speech of Socrates, for he is about to take back his blame of eros and offer a much longer, more beautiful praise, as we shall discuss below (cf. 257aff.). Exercising caution, we take only some questions which we shall apply to the palinode. Above all, we wish to understand the stance taken in the palinode on the relation between beauty and the human good: does the lover attain something truly good or even enter into the best way of life in virtue of his eros? Does the palinode offer any support for the suggestion with which we concluded our study of the first speech, that while eros is superior to vulgar moderation, philosophy, or the life of the intelligent man, is higher than eros? And if the palinode does support this suggestion, what good does it suggest eros offers over vulgar moderation? That we are inclined to raise such questions after a close study of Socrates' first speech perhaps suggests something of his ultimate purpose in making it, or Plato's purpose in having him make it: by prefacing what is his greatest praise of love with a harsh blame of love, he prepares the reader (or Phaedrus if he thinks back on the speech) to look more critically at the subsequent praise, regardless

of the fact that Socrates will disavow the first speech in the interim. By thus prefacing the praise with the blame of eros that he would have his Socrates take back, Plato makes it easier for readers still enchanted by eros to indulge their eros, and he would have wished to do this precisely if he thought eros superior to the lack of eros for the non-philosophers.

Part Three: Socrates' Palinode

Turning now to the palinode, and taking a preliminary glance at its suggestion of the connection between love, beauty, and the human good or philosophy (cf. especially 249c1-250c6), our interpretation of the conclusion of Socrates' first speech makes little sense. For according to that interpretation eros may be considered qualifiedly good but inferior to rational moderation, and is not the heart of the palinode's teaching that the divinely inspired philosopher is led by his erotic longing for beauty to recall the realm of truly intelligible beings, the contemplation of which constitutes the blessedness of life? Does not Socrates show there not only that the moderation and friendship which Phaedrus has been seen to admire can only reach their perfection through well-managed eros (cf. especially 254b5-256e2), but also that a philosophic life too entails such eros? There can be no doubt that Socrates' palinode does suggest a connection between eros and philosophy, but, as it seems to me, the palinode can hardly be said to explain the connection in an immediately clear or straightforward manner. Furthermore, however highly erotic love for another person may be praised, there can be no doubt that in Socrates' view its rank, as the means to philosophy, is lower than that of philosophy, just as beauty is somehow a means for the recollection of the intelligible beings as a whole. Indeed, since Socrates takes philosophy to be the peak of human life, it would seem that he could only offer the fullest possible praise of eros by somehow connecting it to philosophy (cf. 257a3-4). The question, then, is only whether eros is merely a preliminary means to a philosophic life as the conclusion of Socrates' first speech

suggests or whether eros remains as the indispensable inspiration for philosophizing. Even if the overwhelming impression given by this most beautiful piece of Socratic rhetoric opposes it, we do ourselves no harm by bearing in mind the former possibility as we turn to the interpretation of the palinode; we are inclined thereby only to scrutinize more carefully the connection indicated between philosophy and eros.

The Interlude between Socrates' First and Second Speech

Before offering his palinode, Socrates engages in a brief conversation with Phaedrus, introducing a number of important themes which he will develop in the palinode. First, after Phaedrus asks Socrates why he has not thoroughly praised the nonlover in his previous speech (241d4-7), Socrates, threatening to leave, indicates that their time together is at a critical junction (242a1-2). In asking at this point if Phaedrus has not noticed that he had already gone from dithyrambs to epic verse in his speech, and that he therefore would be unable to continue to the praise Phaedrus requested (241e1-3), Socrates calls our attention to his previous speech's concluding line, which was in the epic dactylic hexameter.⁴³ In this line, he portrays the lovers as wolves chasing lambs (241d1), thus reversing his previous rehabilitation of lovers (see pages 125-128 above). Socrates thus seems to note that Phaedrus' question shows his misunderstanding of the whole speech, and, perhaps more importantly, that Phaedrus shows no repugnance at such a portrayal of lovers. It is then perhaps this defect of Phaedrus which inclines Socrates to leave.

⁴³ See Nichols (1998, 43 note 70).

Phaedrus asks Socrates to stay, suggesting they converse about the speeches (242a3-6), perhaps showing that Phaedrus is still open to some education. While Socrates will stay, he uncharacteristically chooses to offer a second, much longer speech rather than discuss the content of the speeches.⁴⁴ Socrates indicates two reasons for this choice, both stemming from his sense of the inadequacy of his first speech. The first speech was both simpleminded and impious; Socrates must purify himself for these offenses (242d7, 243b3-7, d3-5). There is reason to doubt Socrates is in need of such purification, for he seems to have been aware of the misleading content of the previous speech from the start, as is indicated both by his covering himself out of shame before the speech (237a4-5, cf. 242c7-8, 243b4-7), his self-interruption in the speech's middle (238c5ff.), and the details of the speech which show Socrates' disagreement with its apparent teaching.⁴⁵ In this case, it is more likely that Phaedrus is the one in need of purification. The speech's simplemindedness, which consists in its maintaining a false thesis merely to gain reputation among "little men" (242e5-243a2), renders the speech contemptible to men of more noble breeding with experience of love (243c2-d1). This is already of some concern to Phaedrus (243d2), as Socrates notes (243c1-2). On the other hand, the speech's impiety is of somewhat less concern to Phaedrus (242d10, 243b8-9). Thus it seems Socrates is especially concerned with Phaedrus' impiety. The rhetoric of Socrates' palinode is therefore meant to lead Phaedrus' soul towards piety; it will be an enchanting speech.

⁴⁴ See Griswold (1986, 71); Benardete (1991, 127).

⁴⁵ Consider also his attribution of the speech to Phaedrus (242d11-e1, 243e9-244a1).

Phaedrus' doubts about the gods, as well as some concern with piety, were indicated near the dialogue's beginning, as Socrates reminds us now by referring to his speech's impiety as "terrible" (*deinon*) (242d4-7; cf. 236d10-e1), for this was the term Socrates had used earlier to describe the impious sophists (229d4). There, Phaedrus, expressing some interest in Socrates' own views, asked whether Socrates believed the myth of Boreas' possession of Oreithyia was true (229c4-5). Socrates responded by indicating that, unlike the sophists with whom Phaedrus is known to have associated (cf. *Protagoras* 315c, cf. *Phaedrus* 266d5ff.), he is not satisfied by replacing myths relying on divine beings with accounts relying on natural causes (229c7-d1). For he regards such a task as incapable of completion (229d2-e4) and, in any event, as secondary to his need for self-knowledge, in the absence of which the Delphic injunction compels him to investigate himself (229e4-230a1). Socrates gives Phaedrus no chance to respond to his account (230a6-7), and, given the brevity of Socrates' statement, Phaedrus is probably still unsure of what Socrates believes about the gods. The palinode will offer a fuller account.

Prior to the palinode, and even prior to indicating his first speech's impiety, Socrates already begins to hint at his view of the gods. After indicating that Phaedrus has caused him to give another speech (242b4-5), Socrates attributes this decision to his daimonion (242b8-c3),⁴⁶ and indicates that, in his own way, he engages in prophecy, purifications, and poetry, the three forms of divine madness which he will discuss at the

⁴⁶ For more extensive discussion of the daimonion see Strauss (1983, 45-47); Bruell (1999, 48,112).

beginning of his palinode (cf. 244a8-245a8).⁴⁷ The soul too is somehow prophetic, as Socrates' soul divines his error (242c3-9); Socrates will imitate Stesichorus' method of purification (243a3-b5, cf. 244a2); and he has already invoked the Muses to begin his first speech (237a7-b1). Yet Socrates' own versions of the traditional forms of divine madness are highly unconventional: it is unclear whether he regards his first speech as genuinely inspired, but he regards its content in any event as impious; his prophecy and purification are the work of his own soul, and he does not attribute them to any god. We shall have to wait for the palinode to further assess Socrates' relationship to these three traditional forms of divine madness.

Finally, we should note that when Socrates says he will imitate Stesichorus' method of purification, he indicates that he will do so by modeling his own palinode on that of Stesichorus, from whose speech Socrates' takes its name (243a3-b5, 244a2, cf. 257a4). Stesichorus, like Homer, lost his sight due to his evil speaking regarding Helen (243a3-6), which evidently means that these poets committed an impiety in attributing the horrors of the Trojan War to the beautiful Helen and the love she inspired. Thus, Stesichorus wrote, "this speech is not genuine, she did not go on well-benched ships, nor did she come to Pergamon of Troy" (243a8-b1). By so writing, Stesichorus no longer attributes the war to Helen, but he accomplishes this only by also denying that the lover, Paris, was gratified. Socrates will follow this pattern, for he will argue for the goodness of beauty, but only by denying that the lover should be gratified (cf. 256b7-c6).⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Cf. Sallis (1975, 134-135); Burger (1980, 46); Griswold (1986, 76-77), Benardete (1991, 133).

⁴⁸ Cf. Benardete (1991, 130).

Divine Madness

Socrates makes the question of the connection between the gods and eros thematic from the outset of his palinode. He does this first by attributing his speech to Stesichorus, whom he refers to as the son of Euphemus (244a2), thus suggesting the pious character of the forthcoming speech,⁴⁹ and then by indicating that the precise failure of the previous speech was the failure to see the divine character of some madness, which, as Socrates will argue, includes erotic madness. That is, the thesis that one should prefer a nonlover to a lover due to the lover's madness would be fine (*kalos*), if madness were simply bad, but in fact the greatest goods (*agathon*) come to be through divinely given madness (244a4-8). Therefore, before turning to his argument that eros is sent by the gods (cf. 245b7-c4), Socrates offers more general evidence that madness is not simply bad, adducing examples of madness which are widely accepted as divine. By calling attention to the broad acceptance of the divinity of these forms of madness, Socrates surely raises some doubt about the condemnation of madness, thus preparing his audience to consider eros' connection to the divine. At the same time, however, as Phaedrus' question and Socrates' response near the outset of the dialogue indicate (229c4ff.), the acceptance of the divinity of these forms of madness, though widespread, is not simply universal; by tying his thesis about eros to these forms of madness, Socrates necessarily raises the question, for some people (including Phaedrus), of whether the connection between eros and the gods is not as dubious as that of the other forms of madness. Furthermore, Socrates' introductory suggestion of the divinity of these other forms of madness appears

⁴⁹ *Euphamos* means uttering words of good omen or maintaining a religious silence.

all the more out of place when compared with his subsequent ranking of human lives, for the relatively low ranking of the lives characterized by such madness hardly accords with his initial praise (248d7-e2). There, the lives are ranked in accordance with the amount of truth a soul has seen (248d2), and Socrates therefore implies that however divine these forms of madness may be, their awareness of the principles of their inspiration or madness is deficient. Since these forms of madness are taken to be sent from the conventionally accepted gods (cf. 265b2-4), Socrates' indication would seem to be that they entail mistaken views of the gods. Socrates therefore seems to begin his palinode by quietly calling attention to the generally pervasive misunderstanding of the gods which permits the widespread acceptance of the divinity of these forms of madness.

Of the three forms of non-erotic divine madness, Socrates speaks first and at greatest length of prophecy. Whereas Socrates claimed that divine madness brings the greatest goods, he now asserts that the prophets at Delphi and Dodona have accomplished many beautiful things (*kala*) when mad, while accomplishing nothing when moderate (244a8-b3).⁵⁰ One might suggest Socrates is using beauty and goodness interchangeably here, but this seems unlikely in a speech dedicated to the precise understanding of beauty. The suspicion that, in Socrates' view, whatever goodness may derive from prophecy is not derived directly but via its beauty is perhaps further strengthened by his additional note that the Sibyl and other prophets have "guided aright" (*orthosan*) many (244b3-5), given the ambiguity of his earlier use of *orthos* (see pages 113-114 above).

⁵⁰ Furthermore, these are accomplished for Greece and not necessarily for the prophets or the individuals who have consulted them, despite the fact that Socrates indicates that the prophets have been subject to both private and public consultation (244a8-b3). The Greek communities may be more directly beautified by these prophets and the general piety their presence cultivates than are the individuals who consult them.

To embellish his praise of prophecy, Socrates engages in some playful etymologizing, which, while supporting the praise of prophecy, first places the difference between all the forms of divine madness on the one hand and human thought on the other in the starkest light, and then playfully puts in question the superiority of such madness. Socrates claims that prophecy (*mantike*), was originally named “the art of madness” (*manike*), for the ancients believed divine madness beautiful, but “those now,” inexperienced in beauty (*apeirokalos*), add a tau to the name (244c-5). Prophecy, therefore, in the ancient view, was not distinguished from other forms of madness,⁵¹ and Socrates’ next etymology helps explain this apparent conflation. Socrates claims that the ancients named the (non-divine) inquiry into the future by means of birds and others signs “the art of understanding-thought-information” (*oionoistiken*), since it “provides intelligence (*noun*) and information (*historian*) from thinking (*dianoia*) for human understanding (*anthropinei oieseis*),” whereas “the young” today make the name for this merely human art more solemn, lengthening the omicron to an omega, naming it “bird augury” (*oionistiken*) (244c5-d1). Socrates thus contrasts all human thought (*dianoia*), including that of philosophers (cf. 249c4-5), with madness.⁵² While the two arts in question are directly concerned only with the future (244c1, 244c6), the human art, at any rate, makes predictions based on its understanding of the past and present. Therefore, prophecy implies the rejection of one’s merely human understanding, not only of the future but of all things, in favor of an understanding given by the gods. Thus, the ancient conflation of all the forms of divine madness into prophecy implies that the defining

⁵¹ The madness of ritual purification is also said to “prophecy” (*propheteusasa*) (244d7).

⁵² Cf. Burger (1980, 49).

feature of divine madness is that one's understanding is taken to be given by the gods, a characteristic that would hold of poetic inspiration and ritual purifications. The contrast between divine madness and human thought raises the question of whether one should guide oneself by human thought alone or whether one's thought should rely on the gods. Socrates then concludes his etymologizing by rendering his apparent preference for the divine questionable, saying, "by as much as prophecy (*mantike*) is more perfect and honored than bird augury (*oionistiken*), both *in name* and in deed, by so much do the ancients testify that madness from god is more beautiful than human moderation" (244d2-5). Socrates uses the modern names, in which prophecy has been named gracelessly and bird augury has been solemnized, and then suggests a comparison of the two names, in order to rank the two arts. Socrates' later ranking of the philosophic life far above the prophetic would then seem to remove any doubt as to which he regards as superior (248d2ff.).

Socrates turns next to the madneses of ritual purifications and poetry. Here, while praising each form of madness as divine, he quietly notes their limitations. The purifying madness comes to those "for whom it was needful" and discovers prayers and rituals to release those in need from the sicknesses and toils of ancient guilt (244d5-e1). Socrates indicates that this madness had to arise for these people, and his omission of any god who provides it suggests that it is the inevitable result of the sickness of those who go mad.⁵³ Furthermore, Socrates suggests that the purifying rituals make their practitioner safe for the present and future but immediately adds that it is release from

⁵³ Of course, since he wishes to praise divine madness, Socrates also for this reason cannot trace this sickness, which stems from "ancient guilt", to the gods.

present evils in particular that is found (244e2-4). The release from evils then coincides with the state of madness rather than resulting from the prayers and rituals discovered in a state of madness (cf. 244e1-2). Socrates allows or implies that the purifying madness itself consists in a self-forgetting state, in which one's awareness of guilt vanishes, and after which one may live regarding oneself as guilt-free.⁵⁴ Finally, Socrates addresses the madness of poets who, however much they may be aided in their work by inspiration from the Muses and so "educate posterity" (245a1-5), do not also educate themselves, for Socrates here omits mention of the poet's self-education, and he elsewhere denies it outright (cf. *Apology* 22b-c, *Protagoras*, 247e, and *Republic* 601a).⁵⁵ The cost of poetic inspiration seems to be self-ignorance.

We must note, however, that despite his doubts about the conventionally accepted forms of divine madness, Socrates still goes out of his way to make his defense of eros depend upon its being given by the gods. That is, as Socrates turns from his introductory discussion of other forms of divine madness to his defense of eros, he states what he must prove, binding his defense of eros to its divine origin. Whereas it would seem that a defense of eros only requires showing that love is good, Socrates says that he must show that eros is given by the gods for the greatest good fortune, just as his opponent must show not only that eros is harmful, but that it is not sent to the lover and beloved from the gods for their benefit (245b4-c1). It could seem that Socrates unnecessarily increases the difficulty of his task by demanding that he prove the divine origin of eros, but then we

⁵⁴ Cf. Burger (1980, 49).

⁵⁵ Cf. Burger (ibid.). Consider also 268c-269a in context, where Socrates attributes the poetic art to Euripides and Sophocles and does not suggest one must gain inspiration from the Muses to attain this art.

must also note the great difficulty Socrates supplies to his opponent, the moderate man who wishes to be chosen as a friend instead of the lover (245b4),⁵⁶ namely, that he must disprove the divinity of eros. Such rationalizations of myths as Socrates earlier attributed to the sophists do not seem to satisfy Socrates' demand for such a proof (cf. 229c6ff.). Thus, when Socrates goes on to say that his "demonstration" (*apodeixis*) will be untrustworthy to the clever (*deinois*), using the term by which he characterized the sophists (229d4, cf. 242d4-7), the limitation Socrates admits to his speech's persuasiveness seems to indicate the defective character of the sophists rather than any theoretical superiority they may possess. Socrates can therefore add that his speech will be trustworthy to the wise (245c2). With this addition, however, Socrates suggests a change from the stance towards myth that he previously claimed to hold, for earlier, however ironically, Socrates also attributed the distrust of myth to the wise (229c6) and claimed that he himself set aside questions of the truth of myth, accepted the customary beliefs, and tried only to know himself (229e4-230a2).⁵⁷ Now, Socrates separates the wise from the merely clever and indicates that he cannot avoid an investigation of the gods; such an investigation is necessary for self-knowledge in any erotic being.

The Immortality and Idea of Soul

The beginning of Socrates' demonstration takes the form of a proof of the soul's immortality. It is true, as Griswold notes, that "no one maintains that the palinode's

⁵⁶ Socrates has now changed the contest over whom the beloved should gratify to one over whom the beloved should befriend (cf. 243e5-6, 244a4-5): this is in keeping with Socrates' later suggestion that gratification (in its usual meaning) should be avoided for the sake of philosophic friendship (256a7-c5).

⁵⁷ Compare, however, 252e5-253a1; see pages 169-174 below.

argument for immortality...is sound" (1986, 144). Yet Socrates' subsequent myth presupposes the immortality of incorporeal human souls,⁵⁸ and his depiction of the erotic experience then relies on that myth. To save Socrates from the logical blundering of which his proof seems to render him guilty, one is tempted to interpret the soul's "immortality" here, as Griswold does, allegorically. He writes:

"Immortality" expresses...the thesis that a person can in principle transcend the obstacles posed by the dimensions of time and space to which a soul is...bound. The transcendence, again, occurs not by a soul's *literally* leaving this life via the gates of death but by means of *knowledge*. "Immortality" is a way of expressing the primordial connection between the soul and Being. (1986, 145)

That is, by saying the soul is immortal, Socrates only means the soul can gain knowledge of eternal truths. Now, as Griswold further notes (1986, 147), this allegorical interpretation raises the question of why Socrates did not just speak literally, and to his credit, Griswold undertakes to answer this question (1986, 147-151). In his answer, Griswold does not discuss "immortality" in particular but rather Socrates' use of "mythic language" in general; he notes that Socrates' mythic language is especially suited to the experience of lovers: "Phenomenologically speaking, the lover may indeed feel that the beloved is godlike..." (1986, 148). The beloved's being "godlike," however, to say nothing of his being worshiped as a god or his motivating a lover to investigate the nature of a god (251a6, 253e5ff.), presupposes the belief in gods, whose immortality surely consists in more than their access to "Being".⁵⁹ Furthermore, the belief in the gods presupposes also a belief in one's own immortality at least insofar as, in Socrates'

⁵⁸ Thus, while the "proof" of the soul's immortality could seem to refer to some non-individuated "all-soul" (245c5), the meaning of the subsequent myth clearly suggests that the immortality of individual souls is presumed to have been proven.

⁵⁹ Thus the gods only occasionally view the beings and at other times have other activities (246e4-247a8).

account of lovers, it is a belief in those gods whom one follows as an immortal soul. In other words, Griswold would seem to admit that the erotic experience which Socrates describes does depend on a belief in literal immortality. This fact then points us to the fundamental problem with the attempt to allegorize immortality: transcendence of the obstacles posed by space and time means more to us than the possibility of knowledge; in particular, it means, as we shall discuss below, that freedom from bodily evils, especially death, the yearning for which Socrates so beautifully expresses in the palinode (cf. especially 250c1-6). This is to say that the erotic experience, in Socrates' account, entails belief in an immortality which, going far beyond merely permitting our mind's access to "Being", means the personal immortality of the soul. In ruling out the allegorical interpretation of immortality, however, we have also come across a possible explanation of Socrates' failed attempt to prove its existence. Belief in immortality, immortality in the full sense of transcending death, is a belief characteristic of lovers, and Socrates' failure may thus indicate not his own error, but his wish to indicate quietly the limitations of the erotic experience while offering it his highest praise. It makes sense in particular to ascribe such an intention to Socrates given his desire both to raise Phaedrus' appreciation of eros and to turn Lysias, to whom Phaedrus will attempt to relate the speech, to philosophy (257b3-6, 243d5-e1, cf. 228a5ff.). Further scrutiny of the speech will support this interpretation.

Unsound as his proof may be, Socrates presumably offers this particular argument for the soul's immortality for some reason. The argument's basic structure is as follows: that which is always moving is immortal; only the self-moving is always moving, and the

soul is self-moving and hence immortal (245c5-e3).⁶⁰ While Socrates presents the first two steps rather straightforwardly, the third is more complicated. By Socrates' account, what is self-moving must also be a source for all other moved beings, for a source must never come into being, but whatever comes into being must come from a source (245c8-d2).⁶¹ This source must also be indestructible, for otherwise the heaven and generation would collapse with its destruction (245d7-e2). With so much then depending on the soul, and its own immortality at stake, Socrates now asserts that one "would not be ashamed" to affirm that the soul is what is self-moving (245e2-4). In this way, Socrates makes the soul's immortality depend upon its being self-moving, and he makes the affirmation of this dependent on shame, giving no reason for it, thus rendering this premise especially questionable. Suspicion that the soul might not be self-moving in the required sense is heightened when we look back to Socrates' earlier statement that "what moves another and is moved by another" is mortal (245c6-7). For while it should only be a thing's being moved by another, or its dependence on another, which renders a thing mortal, Socrates there adds also what moves another, which is the very thing Socrates says soul does for body (245e4-6). But then the question may become whether soul, as a self-mover that moves another is not also such as to be moved,⁶² and in raising this

⁶⁰ See Sallis for a much more detailed and exceptionally clear presentation of the argument (1975, 135-140).

⁶¹ Socrates thus also asserts the principle of causality in the course of his proof, and his argument presents soul as the principle on which all movement depends and thus as the foundation of the intelligibility of the cosmos. Perhaps this is also the meaning of Socrates' later indication that incorporeal soul manages the cosmos and takes care of everything without soul (246b6-c1). In this case, Socrates' myth presents a cosmos whose intelligibility is grounded in the immortal soul, thus providing a foundation for philosophy. The failure of the proof then leaves open the question of whether the cosmos is intelligible, unless the unmoved hypouranian beings, to which even the gods are subordinate, are meant to replace the immortal soul in this respect.

⁶² Cf. Sallis (1975, 139-140)

question we cannot help but recall Socrates' reference to the lover as the one "having been moved" (*kekinemenou*) immediately prior to his "proof". The lover's "having been moved" may refer to the growth of his soul's wings as it absorbs the particles of the beloved's beauty (251c5-d1); his soul's mad dash after the beloved, at whose sudden conclusion the soul's horses stop moving entirely at the sight of the beloved's beauty and moderation (254b5-c2); or his soul's past motion around the hupouranian beings, to which love somehow recalls him, where the soul itself "stands fast" and is moved by the heavenly rotation, (247b7-c1). In any event, eros or our erotic experience seems to be the preeminent evidence for the soul's being moved, and Socrates' proof therefore fails precisely so as to point to eros as the marker of mortality.⁶³ In this way, we can then understand more easily Socrates' statement at his proof's conclusion: "all body to which [being moved] comes from within itself is ensouled, since this is the nature of soul" (245e4-6). For this suggests that the soul's nature is bound to the way in which a certain kind of body is moved, and this would seem to make soul somehow dependent on body, which, as we shall see, means mortal.

Socrates turns from his conditional conclusion of the soul's immortality (245e6-a1) to its idea (*idea*) (246a3), or what sort it is (246a4), or what it is like (246a5). The very order of the argument highlights the difficulty of beginning with soul's immortality: must one not first know what soul is in order then to determine whether it is such as to be immortal? Furthermore, Socrates indicates that it is beyond his power to give an account

⁶³ To the objection that I have just asserted that belief in immortality belongs to eros, only now to suggest that eros is a sign of mortality, it may be that the very awareness of mortality that underlies the erotic experience spurs one towards the hope for immortality which accompanies that experience, and that reflection on that hope then makes one more deeply aware of the problem which it was to address.

of what sort soul is, both due to the length but also the divinity of such an account (246a4-6), and he thereby highlights his account's limitation to a merely human perspective, thus raising the question of whether what we know of soul through our embodied experience of it is compatible with immortality. At first sight, Socrates' likeness of soul, as a charioteer with two winged horses (246a6-7),⁶⁴ seems designed to fulfill the requirement that soul be self-moving. Socrates, however, presents the soul as a composite, each part of which seems to be derivative; the parts of the gods' souls are "from the good" (246a7-8), and those of humans have a mixed ancestry (246b1). Recalling that Socrates linked the soul's self-movement to its being a source of everything else which itself had no source, we see that Socrates' image of soul fails this requirement. Regarding the parts of the soul, both the gods and humans have two winged horses, and while the human horses are of mixed quality, one being good and beautiful, and one opposite to this (246b2-3), the gods' horses are both good and therefore seem to be indistinguishable;⁶⁵ Socrates seems to model the gods' souls on the human as their perfection.⁶⁶ But the human soul includes a bad horse, and the meaning of this horse' badness seems to be intelligible only in terms of embodied human experience. That is, as Socrates later admits (253c7-d3), the virtue and badness of the horses is only explained in regard to the erotic experience, and in this experience, the horse's badness is inseparable

⁶⁴ Socrates omits reference to the chariot which would unify the soul (Sallis 1975, 141n.22; Burger 1980, 54; Griswold 1986, 93; Benardete 1991, 136). This may reflect the fact that the aim of each part seems to be different (cf. 247d1-2 with e4-6). Since their aims are different, it is no surprise that the connection between desire and thought, on which Socrates' defense of eros is based, is so difficult to recognize and that so many lovers accordingly go astray.

⁶⁵ The gods horses are not said to be beautiful; as we shall see, beauty has a special significance for human beings.

⁶⁶See Burger (1980, 54).

from bodily sexual desire.⁶⁷ Thus Socrates' image of soul, which is supposed to be incorporeal, attributes to soul corporeal attributes; our experience of life and hence soul seems to limit our account of soul to one of corporeal souls.

After presenting his image of the soul, Socrates attempts to say,⁶⁸ how a living being or animal (*zoon*) came to be called both mortal and immortal (246b5-6). The task is ambiguous: having argued for soul's immortality, Socrates may be asking what can still be understood by death, but he may also be asking how we came to speak of humans and gods as mortal and immortal living beings respectively. In any event, both questions are addressed. Mortality and animality or life are the result of the soul's embodiment which itself follows from the soul's loss of wings, animals being the composites of soul and body, and death being the subsequent separation of soul from body (246c2-6, cf. 256d4-5). Our embodiment implies our mortality. Regarding immortal living beings, Socrates says, "immortal is not from any reasoned-out account (*logou lelogismenou*), but we fashion (*plattomen*) god without seeing or sufficiently understanding (*hikanos noesantes*) as some immortal living being, having a soul and body naturally grown together for all time" (246c6-d2). It is unclear how to take these lines: do they indicate that gods are merely a human fabrication? Or are they merely a criticism of the conventional attribution of bodies to gods? At the least, Socrates indicates that living beings or animals have bodies and that the idea of an immortal ensouled body is unreasonable, presumably because bodies are moveable and hence destructible. This

⁶⁷ See especially 254a4, where the black horse "no longer" heeds the charioteer's goads after the sight of the beloved, implying that the black horse only comes into his own with sexual arousal.

⁶⁸ It is only in this section of the myth that Socrates indicates he can make only an "attempt". His later account of how eros leads a lover to see his beloved as a god may in part be regarded as the completion of this attempt to say how an animal comes to be called immortal.

implies that the gods are not animals or living beings. Life is incompatible with immortality.⁶⁹ The gods are not as “we fashion” them or as they are conventionally taken to be, and having ruled out this possibility, Socrates reverently allows these things to be and be said “as is dear to the god” (246d2-3).

Wing Loss and the Heavenly Journey

Since embodiment, or the mark of our mortality, is caused by the loss of wings, Socrates turns next to the cause of wing loss. First, he explains the function of wing, which is to raise the “weighty” (*embrithes*) up to where the gods dwell (246d6-7). It now appears that human souls are heavy, which seems to imply, again, that our souls are bodily. Socrates later indicates that it is the horse with badness which is heavy (247b3-4), but given the especially close connection between the bad horse and bodily desire indicated above, the attribution of weight to the bad horse seems to point again to the bodily attributes of soul. In any event, immediately after implying that souls are heavy, Socrates refers to soul (according to the manuscripts) or the wings of soul (according to Plutarch and the editors) as “pertaining to the body” (*peri to soma*) (246d8).⁷⁰ Now the account of wing loss is to explain embodiment and hence our mortality as immortal souls, but if the soul is always bodily and hence mortal, as Socrates seems to suggest, then such an account is senseless. It may then be for this reason that Socrates’ account of wing loss, despite its many interesting details, leaves the loss of wing unexplained in a

⁶⁹ Socrates only mentions life in his proof of the soul’s immortality to indicate that those beings which cease moving cease living; he avoids saying that the always moving is always living (245c5-7).

⁷⁰ Cf. De Vries (1969, 130).

fundamental and notable sense. It is true that Socrates explains wing loss by reference to the human soul's inability to view the hupouranian beings, which nourish the wings (248c5-8), but this inability is ultimately rooted in the difficulty of managing the bad horse, a difficulty which is itself unexplained (248a1ff, cf. 247b2-5, 246b4).

Furthermore, the necessity that wings be lost when the beings are not seen is left so unclear that Socrates must introduce, with no explanation, the "ordinance of Adrasteia," which determines by decree that those souls who have seen any of the beings may retain their wings while those that fail enter human bodies (248c2-d2).⁷¹ Similarly, no explanation is given for souls' regaining their wings after a certain number of human lives (249a1); wings certainly cannot return because they have been nourished once more by the beings, for the sight of the beings depends on already having wings.

If, then, embodiment and mortality are simply the conditions of the human soul, what can we make of the extended discussion of wing loss? As indicated above, and as I shall try to explain below, Socrates presents the immortal life of the soul to help present the erotic experience, which includes belief in some such life. Yet, given the wide variety of beliefs about the afterlife and given the highly unconventional depiction Socrates offers here, it is hardly clear that the presentation of the erotic experience requires just this myth. The unconventional character of Socrates' myth is most manifest at the climax of the myth, at the depiction of the hupouranian realm and the divine banquet. It is this realm which all souls strive to view (247d1-3, 248b5-c2), and therefore it is the contemplation of this realm, containing as it does the true, i.e., incorporeal,

⁷¹ Cf. Burger (1980, 58).

unchanging beings with which true knowledge is concerned (247c5-e2), which constitutes the highest activity of all souls. Thus we may say Socrates makes the center of his myth an activity similar but superior to philosophy (cf. 249c1-6). This not only allows Socrates to offer a simple account of the superiority of philosophy, as the life which most fulfills the longing of all embodied souls, but it also allows him to indicate the connection between eros and philosophy, a connection by no means obvious, in a remarkably straightforward manner. That is, Socrates' myth permits him to present rhetorically the truth, which he will only explain more subtly, that the end of eros is philosophy.⁷² By the above account, the details of the myth can be fully explained only by reference to Socrates' later description of the erotic experience, but before turning to that description, let us turn back to where we left off and prepare ourselves by highlighting the myth's main points.

The wings' power takes the soul to the dwelling place of the gods, but their nourishment is the divine, which is beautiful, wise, and good and everything of that sort (246d6-e1).⁷³ As Socrates later clarifies, these are the hypouranian beings (248c1-2). Hence, wings alone do not suffice to take a soul to the beings, and Socrates must add a discussion of the gods, for it is by following them that human souls reach the beings (247a6-b, 248a1-6). Socrates' turn to the gods here, including the names and number of

⁷² Socrates' subtlety in explaining the connection between eros and philosophy, the best way of life, permits him the subtlety in indicating the limitations of eros, for which purpose, as we have already seen, he also uses his mythic discussion: the myth serves both to provide the beliefs which support eros and rhetorically connect eros to philosophy and also to indicate the harsher truths in light of which eros may be more fully understood.

⁷³ Socrates adds that the ugly, bad and other contraries destroy the wings (246e3-4), omitting mention of ignorance or the opposite to wisdom. Perhaps Socrates thereby indicates that wings, being other than the mind, are not so directly opposed by ignorance.

the traditional gods (246e4-247a4),⁷⁴ yet occurring as it does shortly after he professed ignorance of the gods or denied their conventionally accepted character (246c6-246d3), is striking. It would seem that Socrates allows that the gods who lead a winged soul to the beings retain something of the character conventionally attributed to them.⁷⁵ Yet the activity of the gods is quite unconventional. Zeus, the god Socrates will indicate philosophers followed (252e2-3), is the leader in the heaven and he orders his army or chorus⁷⁶ putting the gods in their ranks (246e4-247a4). Hestia, however, remains at home (247a1-2), allowing that one may follow one goddess, namely the one associated with the home and thus one's own things, perfectly and still see nothing of the beings.⁷⁷ Socrates tells us little of what the gods do: Zeus takes care of all things (246e5-6), but it is unclear toward what end, and the gods maintain the station assigned to each, seeing many happy sights (247a2-4). Zeus evidently orders the gods well giving them suitable stations, and their activity, as far as Socrates tells us, is theoretical, viewing the sights of the heavens. Socrates does, however, add two details describing the way in which the gods act: each does his own things (*pratton hekastos auton*) minding his own business (247a6), or practicing justice in the sense of the *Republic* (cf. *Republic* 433a8-b1),⁷⁸ and the gods, not being envious, permit whoever is willing and able to follow them (247a6-7). The gods' freedom from envy accords with their justice, for, minding their own business,

⁷⁴ See Burger (1980, 55), cf. De Vries (1969, 131-132).

⁷⁵ Cf. Benardete (1991, 136, 148).

⁷⁶ Cf. 246e6-247a1 with 247a7, 250b6, 252d1: only when describing Zeus' leadership does Socrates refer to the divine arrangement as an army; the divine activities subsequently seem more peaceful than those of an army and the ordering therefore perhaps less impressive or demanding.

⁷⁷ Cf. Burger (1980, 55-56)

⁷⁸ See Burger (1980, 56).

they do not begrudge the success of others or compel those able but unwilling to follow them, although this latter group would naturally miss the divine banquet.

It is this banquet which Socrates describes next, indicating that the gods, or “those *called* immortal” as Socrates now refers to them,⁷⁹ periodically ascend to the peak of the heavens to nourish their minds by viewing the things outside the heavens (247a8ff.). The clear indication of this passage is that the gods’ minds, except that of Hestia, have unmediated access to the truth, free of the body and change which limits human thought (247c6-7, d7-e1). Thus the banquet allows gods to be wise, and allows humans to have greater or lesser, but, once embodied, only mediated or partial access to such wisdom. Beyond this, one may get the impression from Socrates’ description of this realm that, rather than explaining the precise character of what is truly intelligible (to gods), he engages in a rhetorical flourish to beautify the mythic activity which philosophy is said to imitate. Socrates begins his description saying no poet has ever hymned or will ever hymn the hupouranian realm worthily (247c3-4); he then adds that he must dare to say the truth, especially when speaking of the truth (247c4-6). But would it not have been more truthful of Socrates to admit his ignorance of this realm, instead of describing it?⁸⁰ Socrates next describes the beings with which true knowledge is concerned (247c8), but in his description these are so purified of any connection with the bodily world and relational characteristics (247d6-e1), that, at the least, one cannot see how, in grasping the unity of a manifold of perceptions, humans are recalling such beings, as Socrates later asserts (249b6-c3). However this may be, Socrates indicates that it is by nourishment

⁷⁹ Cf. 247b5-6 with 248a1: Socrates no longer even *calls* human souls immortal.

⁸⁰ Cf. Griswold (1986, 104).

from these beings that the gods maintain their divinity (cf. 249c5-6), and he singles out justice, moderation, and science (*episteme*),⁸¹ indicating that a soul should guide itself by the true view of science and morality.⁸²

After describing the gods' experience of the banquet, Socrates describes the human, and the clearest contrast emerges. Whereas the gods are carried around and peacefully have their fill (247c1-2, 247e2-4), human souls at best, by likening themselves to a god, manage to get their heads into the heavenly rotation while being thrown into confusion by their horses (248a2-5). Other souls may get a glimpse of one or another of the beings but their view is very incomplete (248a5-6), but what is most striking in contrast to the divine chorus is what happens to souls who remain below the surface, who, as such, are at risk of becoming human beings. Hardly free of envy,⁸³ these souls enter into a self-destructive competition with one another, trampling one another and breaking wings (248a6-b3). These souls all long to see the beings and try to follow the gods (248a6-7), and it therefore makes sense that they are frustrated, but it is unclear why such frustration results in competition. Socrates suggests the badness of the charioteer is at the root of this misguided contest (248b2-3); it is the charioteer's job to manage the horses so as to liken the soul to that of a god, and it is clear that these competitive souls are bad at imitating the just gods. Sense can then be made of the competition if the souls striving to be first are doing so out of a specific misunderstanding of the gods and their justice; that is, if the souls are striving to be first in their attempt to follow the gods, so as

⁸¹ Courage is conspicuously absent from this list, which, taking science to imply wisdom, otherwise points to the four traditional virtues. This lowering of courage follows from Socrates' description of the heaven in general: a life such as the gods lead would not require courage.

⁸² Cf. Benardete (1991, 143)

⁸³ See Sinaiko (1965, 71).

to win the affection of their god and thereby receive divine assistance towards reaching the beings, failing to see that the gods' justice entails minding their own business.⁸⁴

Socrates thus seems to indicate that a misunderstanding of justice and the gods is a common impediment among humans in their ascent to the beings (cf. 250a2-4).

The souls which failed to see the beings may then suffer some accident (cf. 248c6), lose their wings, and be implanted in a human body, in accordance with Adrasteia's decree. These embodied souls now live lives arranged hierarchically based on how much of the truth they have seen (248d1-e3), suggesting that one's view of science and morality determines the character of one's life.⁸⁵ The listing of lives is notoriously difficult to explain;⁸⁶ there is a ranking of nine classes of lives, and while it may make sense that the philosopher is at the top of the list and the tyrant at the bottom, the reason for the order of the intervening ranks, e.g. why the lover of exercise surpasses prophets and poets, is less clear. Furthermore, whether one should regard the "or's" within each rank as disjunctive, as the contrast with the use of "ands" within the list would seem to imply, is also unclear; if one takes the or's as disjunctive, lawful kings are set apart from warlike kings as makes sense (248d4-5), but then one must also accept the philosophers' separation from the lover of beauty and the musical erotic man (248d2).

⁸⁴ Cf. Benardete (1991, 142).

⁸⁵ See Benardete (1991, 143).

⁸⁶ Cf. Burger (1980, 58), Griswold (1986, 102). Borrowing and modifying the speculations of these authors, I hazard the very tentative suggestion that the ranking can begin to be understood by separating the first rank, which, includes philosophers who Socrates suggests stand apart from all the others (249a1-2), and then viewing ranks 10-6 as the defective versions of ranks 2-5. Thus tyrants are juxtaposed to kings, pointing to the best and worst care for the city; demagogues and sophists are juxtaposed with statesmen and businessmen, pointing to those possessing a perverse and true art of managing the private and public; craftsmen and farmers are juxtaposed to lovers of exercise and doctors, pointing to the vulgar and healthy treatment of the body; and poets are paired with prophets, evidently indicating the superiority of the prophets with respect to piety. That the treatment of the gods should be ranked lower than that of the city or even the body confirms Socrates' harsh view of the conventional religious beliefs.

However this may be, the subsequent account of the afterlife of the souls before they receive wings, which allows philosophers to be re-winged after three thousand years while all others must wait ten thousand, clearly indicates that the fundamental division of the human lives is between philosophers and non-philosophers.⁸⁷ The view of the city seems to enter into the ranking of the lower lives, with the best regimes at the top and the worst at the bottom;⁸⁸ perhaps Socrates indicates thereby that once opinion has entered to replace knowledge (248b5), the view of the city classifies human lives while pointing to knowledge of the beings. After death, a soul is punished or rewarded based on how justly it has lived its allotted life, and after one thousand years of such punishment or reward it may choose a new life (248e3-249b3). The punishments and rewards are, in keeping with divine justice, not administered by the gods, and there is reason to wonder how effective such punishments and rewards are at helping the souls, as Socrates indicates some choose subhuman lives after receiving their punishments or rewards, failing to recognize the connection between thought and the human body (249b3-5, cf. *Republic* 619b7-d1).⁸⁹

Philosophy and the Erotic Experience

Having indicated that the fundamental division of humans is between philosophers and everyone else, Socrates now indicates something of the character of philosophy. The philosopher is presented as the peak of the human, which is defined by

⁸⁷ See Griswold (1986, 103)

⁸⁸ See Benardete (1991, 143); Burger (1980, 57).

⁸⁹ See Benardete (1991, 144).

its ability to use speech or reason, or, in mythic terms, by its “recollection” of “what really is,” and it is philosophers who are most capable of such recollection (249d6-c6). As indicated above, it is unclear why or how the understanding or speaking of perceptible beings as members of a class, which, as a class, would seem to be in some way dependent upon the particular beings, amounts to recollection of the hupouranian beings, but it does not seem to be Socrates’ intention here to offer a complete theory of being and knowledge.⁹⁰ Rather, Socrates emphasizes the philosophers’ connection to the gods, saying that the philosopher’s thought (not his soul) is winged and that to the best of his power he is in memory near those things “by being near which god is divine” (249c5-6). That is, the philosopher is here presented as the one who most knows the sources or principles of the gods’ divinity. The passage then concludes by noting the consequence for the philosophers: coming to be near the divine, they stand apart from matters of human seriousness and are rebuked by the many, who see them not as inspired, but as disturbed (249c8-d3).

With this description of philosophy, Socrates turns, finally, to erotic madness, indicating that the whole speech has arrived now (explicitly) at the subject with which it has been concerned throughout (249d4-5),⁹¹ and he seems thereby to indicate the identity of the philosopher and the lover. The lover also has “no care” for the things below but recalls true beauty and longs for the things above (249d5-8), and, as the philosopher is inspired (249d2), the lover also partakes of the best inspiration (249e1). Yet, the inspiration of the philosopher leads him to the divine, i.e., the principles of the gods’

⁹⁰ Cf. Sallis (1975, 145-146).

⁹¹ Thus Socrates confirms that his myth has been tailored to the description of eros.

divinity, whereas the inspiration of the lover comes from the gods (249e1-2), and Socrates does not refer to the philosopher's madness (*mania*) but only to that of the lover. Whereas philosophers were near the beings with winged thought, the lovers, with their souls beginning to grow wings, long to fly up but lack the power (249d6-7), and the experience of lovers later seems to be essentially one of confusion, for which reason it is a state of madness (cf. especially 251a6-7, d7-8), but philosophy would seem to require the possibility self-knowledge and knowledge of the other beings. Finally, the philosophic activity is characterized by the correct use of reason or speech (249b6-c6), but erotic madness is characterized especially by vision (249d5, 250d2-3, 251a3, b2ff.). There can be no doubt that Socrates indicates a role for eros in a philosopher's life, but, as it seems to me, it is his rhetorical presentation of eros that tends, especially here, to make it seem as if the two were identical or as if philosophy were simply the best form of erotic madness.

After introducing erotic madness, Socrates turns to the difficulty, especially for philosophy, which eros addresses. Repeating that every human soul has by nature beheld the beings, Socrates adds now that they are difficult to recollect (249e4-250a2).⁹² Two difficulties render recollection impossible for some souls: an inadequate vision of the beings in heaven, which seems to mean a lack of intellectual capacity, and unjust activity on earth (250a2-5). On earth as in heaven justice is essential to one's ascent to the truth. Furthermore, even those souls without these handicaps do not recall the truth with ease; encountering some image of the beings, they lose possession of themselves and are

⁹² Earlier this seemed to be due to Adrasteia's ordinance rather than nature (248c8ff.).

perplexed (250a6-b1). Such perplexity then spurs only a few souls to discover the truth of these images (250b4-5). In particular, Socrates indicates that justice, moderation and “the other things honored by souls” have no splendor here and as such are hard to see, or, more precisely, to understand, for they are understood, unlike beauty which is seen (cf. 250d2-3), through “dim organs,” presumably the ears,⁹³ by hearing speeches (250b1-5). While Socrates does grant that some few are able to proceed from the images of justice and moderation here to the truth without any mention of eros or beauty and thus does not exclude the possibility of an unerotic philosopher,⁹⁴ he presents the task of philosophy as one which in general is impeded by our limited access to these beings.

One expects Socrates to turn now to beauty and explain how it can assist with this difficulty, as he soon will, but while he does now turn to beauty, he turns to beauty as it was seen in heaven (250b5-6). Perhaps he must do so now as he had not mentioned beauty in his earlier account of the hupouranian beings, and here he also emphasizes that beauty was bright to see in heaven, preparing us for the brightness characteristic of beauty on earth (250c8-d3). Yet with such thoughts of beauty Socrates seems to get carried away, as he soon admits (250c7-8), to a recollection of the soul’s heavenly journey. It would seem that Socrates offers a dramatic presentation of the role beauty may play for philosophy, moving from a thought of beauty to a recollection of the beings, were it not for the fact that Socrates does not now offer any philosophic reasoning about the beings, but rather simply speaks of their souls’ past heavenly bliss. In preparation for

⁹³ See Griswold (1986, 114).

⁹⁴ Cf. Symposium 212b2-4, where Socrates indicates that it would not be easy to find a better helper for human nature (whose end is philosophy) than eros, not that there could be no other helper.

his later claims that philosophers are those who followed Zeus (252e2-3) and that lovers choose a beloved who followed the same god as themselves (252d1), Socrates now suggests that “we” (i.e., he and Phaedrus) were followers of Zeus (250b7). Socrates then describes the heavenly journey, but, beautiful as his myth may have been, he seems to beautify it further here.⁹⁵ He describes them as having been complete and perfect initiates there (250b8-c1), omitting the troubles even the best had managing their bad horses, and he adds that they were then inexperienced of the evils which awaited them (250c2), although immortal souls would have been embodied infinitely many times before. Socrates then concludes his transport recalling especially his freedom from a body, or the mark of his mortality (250c5-6).⁹⁶

When Socrates finishes this recollection of heavenly bliss, he grants that he has gone on at perhaps too great a length, and suggests that his speech be taken as a tribute to memory (250c7-8). The speech certainly beautifies the objects of memory, but it cannot strictly speaking be the product of memory if there is no immortal soul or even if there is one and its experiences were accurately described in the earlier account. Thus Socrates adds that it was said “in yearning for the things of that time” (250c7), suggesting that it is yearning which may inform such “memories” or hopes. Noting that the things of “that time” were not so perfect even in Socrates’ earlier myth as he has just presented them highlights what Socrates seems to emphasize in this latest passage: the yearning for freedom from evils, especially those marked by the body or mortality, which is

⁹⁵ Contrast Socrates’ reference here to the “rites which it is *right to say* (*themis legein*) are most blessed” (250b8-c1) with his depiction of philosophers “always completing perfect rites” (249c7-8).

⁹⁶ As Nichols notes, Socrates use of *asematoi* in this context further points to mortality, as a *sema* may refer to a tomb or burial marker (1998, 55 n.109).

apparently aroused by the thought of beauty, and which motivates Socrates' extended speech, whose theme he has indicated is erotic madness. Thus, before specifying the particular power of beauty on earth, Socrates suggests a connection between eros, beauty, and a yearning for, above all, immortality.

Eros, Beauty, and Wing

This is not to suggest that eros simply is the desire for immortality. Socrates has already indicated that the object of eros is beauty (249e3-4), and it is the distinctive character of beauty that Socrates now addresses. Whereas the likenesses of the other beings have no splendor, appearing as they do to dull organs, beauty seems to be nothing if not splendid, as “the most brightly glistening thing” perceived by our brightest sense (250d2-3).⁹⁷ When Socrates referred to the other beings' lack of splendor, he referred to “justice, moderation, and *the other beings honored by souls*” (249b1-2), and beauty's splendor therefore seems to imply that beauty is of peculiar import to embodied souls (cf. note 65 above). The connection between beauty and body is again brought out by the link Socrates now suggests between beauty's appearance to a *bodily* sense and its being most loveable, for whereas prudence (*phronesis*) would produce terrible loves if it could so appear, it cannot, and beauty is therefore most manifest and most loveable (250d4-e1).

⁹⁷ The superiority of what is seen to what is heard may lie in the trust people are more inclined to put in sight: whereas many are skeptical of justice when they hear about it and are disinclined to pursue it, the mere sight of beauty seems sufficient to elevate and attract the soul. Cf. 273b3-c4 in context, where visible bodily strength is convincing but arguments about virtue are not; cf. Benardete (1991, 186).

Beauty's lovability is thus first linked to its manner of appearance, but Socrates' statement about prudence implies that the content of what appears also determines its loveliness; it hardly makes sense that a thing would be loved regardless of what it is, merely for its appearing brightly.⁹⁸ Beauty, as appearing to sight, must be bodily beauty, and accordingly it is to the attractiveness and loveliness of beautiful (human) bodies that Socrates now turns, not by defining beauty or the loveable but by describing the effect of beauty.

Socrates begins by contrasting the erotic response to beauty with that of someone who is "not a new initiate or has been corrupted" (250e1). In distinguishing between the corrupt and those who are not new initiates, Socrates allows that one may have been initiated some time ago, remain uncorrupted, and no longer be erotically inspired by the sight of the beautiful. The old initiate and the corrupt may be attracted by beauty, but they will have to forgo those experiences which Socrates indicates are distinctive of eros. Without shame or awe or recollection of the beautiful, and with hubris, they will seek pleasure in the manner of a beast, contrary to nature, trying to procreate (250e1-251a1). Socrates' reference to procreation here seems out of place, given the primacy of homosexual eros in the discussion and the fact that many corrupt responses to beauty surely do not involve the attempt to procreate; rather paired as the mention of procreation is with the indication that such a response to beauty is unnatural, Socrates seems to wish

⁹⁸ Although one who wishes above all to know would welcome a sight regardless of its content, merely for its clear appearance, for through this he may know it, surely bodily beauty, the beauty which attracts lovers, is not loved for its intelligibility.

to highlight how paradoxical his account of eros is.⁹⁹ For Socrates will now argue that eros implies such fear and awe before the beauty of the beloved as restrains as well as provokes sexual desire (cf. 254b5-c2), and which, in the best case leads one to a philosophic friendship without sexual gratification (256a7-c5). Such a response to beauty may be considered natural not for its freedom from dependence on conventions (cf. 254b1), but for most fulfilling human nature.

In contrast to those who simply seek sexual gratification from beautiful bodies, Socrates now depicts what he will call “the erotic experience” (252b2-3). In this experience, the lover undergoes something of a religious transformation and the attraction of beauty consists not in sexual arousal but in the essential role it plays in the growth of the soul’s wings, which, as we recall, lead a soul to the gods. Thus, Socrates could seem to present the erotic experience without reference to sexual desire. Yet, after presenting what he calls the erotic experience, Socrates presents several more accounts of falling in love, and sexual desire eventually becomes prominent (cf. 254b3ff.),¹⁰⁰ and within the present account of the erotic experience, with his description of the swelling of the wing’s shaft and the tickling and throbbing associated with wing growth (251b4-6, c3, d4),¹⁰¹ Socrates shows a clear awareness of the sexual component of eros. What is striking then in the present description of the erotic experience is that Socrates presents sexual arousal as a part of what lovers experience as their growth of wings and ascent to

⁹⁹ Alternatively, Socrates may mean by these lines that the homosexual pursuit of intercourse is contrary to nature, which he explains by contrast to the procreation of heterosexual intercourse among the beasts: the end of heterosexual eros may be children but homosexual eros should end in philosophy (cf. *Laws* 837b-d).

¹⁰⁰ There are three or four accounts in total, depending on whether one includes the account of the beloved’s reciprocation of his lover’s love (cf. 255d3 with d8-e2).

¹⁰¹ Cf. Burger (1980, 60-61, 140 notes 41 and 42).

the divine; the distinctive aim of sexual desire is secondary, and the role it plays in such an experience is only explained later.

The “new initiate’s” experience begins upon his seeing “a godlike face, or the look (*idea*) of some body,¹⁰² which imitates beauty well” (251a1-3). Socrates indicates two successive effects of this sight. The order is clear: “first, [the lover] shivers and something of the dreadful things of that time come over him; next, beholding, he feels awe as before a god” (251a3-4). The lover’s initial response to beauty is fear. We have not heard of these “dreadful things” before,¹⁰³ but they are surely not the “happy appearances” which Socrates just so fondly recalled (250c3). “That time” must mean the time when the incorporeal soul saw beauty, and thus Socrates now seems to refer to the great struggle and distress attending the soul’s attempt to see the beings (247b1-3, 248a1ff.). This struggle was rooted in the soul’s concern both for what is best and the nourishment of its wings, i.e., the desire to avoid embodiment or mortality (248b5-c2). The sight of beauty arouses the lover’s fear of imperfection, including his mortality. Such a fear could seem to be dependent on awe at the beautiful boy’s seeming perfection, which, contrasting with and therefore highlighting the lover’s imperfection arouses his fear; Socrates could seem to support this interpretation by his subsequent indication that potential lovers live with a view to the gods prior to falling in love (252d1-5), and by later articulating the response of fear and awe at the sight of beauty in a somewhat less unambiguous order (254b7-8). Yet the order here is clear, and Socrates repeats it saying

¹⁰² Socrates’ reference to the *idea* of the beloved’s body as well as his reference to a “godlike” face indicate that it is not simply bodily beauty that attracts the lover: something of the lover’s soul may be seen in his body.

¹⁰³ Cf. DeVries (1969, 154).

that, as the lover looks, unaccustomed heat “such as arises from shivers” comes upon him (251a7-b1, cf. *Republic* 387c4-5), for this heat implies that hope as the opposite of fear arises from the soul’s response to fear, and these would be hopes such as one feels in awe before a god. The experience of awe is therefore dependent on a prior experience of fear for one’s self, one’s good and one’s life, which is aroused by the sight of beauty. It would be hard to see how hope and awe could arise merely from a terrifying thought, and Socrates does not say that they do, for he adds that the continued flow of beauty heats the soul as the wing begins to grow (251b1-3); awe and its attendant hope are thus dependent on fear but also on the sight of beauty which nourishes them.

In his initial experience of awe, the lover, desiring to sacrifice to the boy as to a statue and a god, is restrained by fear for his reputation (251a5-7), and thus Socrates indicates that this is the beginning of a development at whose conclusion the lover despises all conventions and is ready to serve his beloved as a slave (252a4-6). This development is the result of the growth of wings, which we were told take us to the gods (246d6-7), and thus the wing seems to be the soul’s awe before and hope for the gods, that is, such awe and hope as permit complete dedication to the beloved. As we shall discuss below, Socrates leaves it ambiguous whether a lover must regard his beloved as literally being a god, or whether his beloved only inspires him with belief in other gods, but in either case, Socrates here confirms that eros leads to religious belief.

The sight of the beloved’s beauty nourishes the wings, and they grow in its presence (251b1-7). This is not, however, a simply pleasant experience; Socrates likens it to the cutting of teeth (251c1-5), and the pain in the soul accordingly implies that even

in this new initiate's soul there is something resisting the growth of wing. Furthermore, whenever the lover is apart from his beloved, his wing's passageways begin to close painfully (251d1-6). Memory of the beloved offers some resistance to this pain (251d6-7), but it is insufficient, for the lover is constantly driven to seek the sight of his beloved (251d7-e3). The growth of wing is painful, but the cessation of its growth is even worse, for Socrates indicates that the relief accompanying the lover's regaining sight of his beloved is the "sweetest pleasure" (251e3-252a1).

What in the soul opposes the wings? The wing leads the lover to serve slavishly his beloved as a god (cf. 255a1), and, in light of his awe inspiring beloved, he neglects his other attachments, family, friends, and property (252a2-4). It makes sense then that his soul, attached to these as it initially is, resists his love. Furthermore, the wing growth painfully ceases in the beloved's absence, suggesting that the lover's hope and awe then wavers. That memory of his beloved offers some resistance to this wavering suggests that it is doubts about what he has seen that cause the wavering, doubts which may be partially remedied by memory: is the beloved truly so beautiful, so worthy of service? When the beloved returns to sight, his beauty manifest, the lover is reassured, and he consequently finds the sweetest pleasure in the assurance of his beloved's divinity.

Now, when Socrates says that the lover is ready to serve the beloved as a slave, he explains that this is because, "in addition to feeling awe at the beautiful one, he has found him to be the only doctor for the greatest troubles" (252a7-b1). The only troubles we have seen for the lover, however, are the sacrifices demanded by his love (or the pain attending his soul's acceptance of such sacrifices). The beloved would seem to be the

only doctor for these sacrifices, because, in his service, they are rendered worthwhile. This could seem to make the beloved a poor doctor, providing his patient with great troubles and “healing” him only by making these troubles seem worthwhile, but this is to overlook the fact that the lover who is prepared to sacrifice everything for his beloved would seem to have been freed thereby from his concern for those evils which threaten his other concerns (cf. 252a3-4), including, therefore, his mortality.

That “sweetest pleasure” which accompanies the growth of wing is the delight of having found something worthy of complete dedication (251e3-252a1). This delight consists in the first place in the pleasure of being with and benefiting someone beautiful; Socrates indicates that those who are neither old initiates nor corrupt are attracted to this service. Secondly, Socrates’ indication that the lover’s pleasure is greatly increased as his dedication reaches the point of complete disregard of his own things suggests that the pleasure in finding someone worthy of complete dedication is compounded by the relief it brings, relief that is of one’s concern for oneself and hence one’s mortality (251e3-252b1). But Socrates also indicates that such dedication as lovers have for their beloveds is incomplete; the dedication is accompanied by hopes for oneself, hopes which may provide a considerable addition to the pleasure of devotion (251a7-b7). Furthermore, that wing growth is completed as the lover becomes “fully” dedicated suggests that it is the erotic dedication itself that gives rise to the lover’s fullest hopes. How can this be explained? One finds the “sweetest pleasure” in the relief of forgetting oneself in dedication to a beloved, but, as the very fact that the lover feels pleasure and relief in this self-forgetting as opposed to simply feeling concerned for the well-being of the beloved

shows, the lover's self-forgetting and hence devotion are incomplete. The lover is still concerned for himself, but this concern has been pushed to the back of his mind by his concern for the beloved, hence the lover's feeling of relief. Socrates then indicates that the lover's concern for himself endures in the form of hopes that are aroused. That lovers experience such hopes can be shown easily enough: at the same time that they feel themselves completely dedicated to their beloveds, feeling willing, that is, to give up their own good, lovers also believe their love to be surpassingly good, i.e., good also for themselves (cf. 252a7-b1). Why the lover's concern for himself endures in the form of hopes is, however, more obscure, but it would seem to be obscure of necessity, for it is precisely when the awareness of one's self-concern is lacking that the hopes arise, and we therefore never have a clear experience of the arousal of these hopes. This is not to say that no account could be given, nor that there could not be more and less plausible accounts, but only that we will not have direct experiential confirmation of any particular account. The most we could do, I suppose, is to infer from what we are conscious of in dedication in particular, and from what we observe about the arousal of hopes in general, a particular connection between dedication and hopes. Since I have not yet understood Plato's understanding of the connection, indeed, since I am not even sure of whether he tries to explain one (consider *Laws* 791b1-2 in context from 790c-791b with 672b-d), I refrain from offering my own tentative opinion. I regard it as far more important that we note that in dedication one feels such hopes than that we understand why they are felt. By becoming aware that there is a connection between dedication and hope, we can understand that the delighted dedication felt by lovers for their beloveds would provide

the basis for the hopes characteristic of lovers, hopes which, if made fully explicit, would entail belief in gods who could fulfill them. And, in this way, we may understand how the beloved's beauty causes the growth of the wings that lead the soul to the gods. Finally, by understanding this, we may understand why the lover finds in the beloved "the only doctor for the greatest troubles" (252a7-b1).

We must ask, however, how such devotion and relief as the lover experiences is connected with philosophy. In particular, is the lover's devotion to the beloved rooted in a true discovery of his divinity? Socrates would seem to make this question more pressing by following his description of the erotic experience, focused as it is on the lover's pious awe before his beloved, with two verses juxtaposing the mortal and immortal views of eros. For he suggests that the immortal view, by which mortals may be persuaded (252c1), is hubristic (252b5-6),¹⁰⁴ and he thus raises a question as to whether the lover's pious experience conveys the whole truth. Mortals call Eros winged or flying (*potenon*), while immortals call him The Winged One (*Pterota*), because of the wing-growing necessity (252b8-9). Mortals thus allow that Eros may fly, for *potenon* may mean winged or flying, while immortals do not attribute flight to him. Wings, by flying are to take one to the gods, and the immortal view, hubristic as it may be, would seem to be justified in doubting whether such flight can take place, not only because Socrates has ruled out flight (or even a complete return of wings) for mortal beings (249d6-7, 249a1, 256d4), but also because the god the lover would seem to have discovered in his beloved is precisely what Socrates has indicated is unreasonable: a god

¹⁰⁴ Cf. De Vries (1969, 159-160).

with a body (246c6-d2). The lover, however, may be somewhat aware of this difficulty, for earlier Socrates indicated his confusion as to the divinity of his beloved to whom he wished to sacrifice as both a statue and a god (251a6-7). Perhaps the lover can then come to distinguish clearly between his beloved and the god of which he is a reminder, but to fully understand his experience the lover will have to gain greater clarity about the gods, which, as Socrates is about to indicate, the lover will try to do. We will have to see whether the lover may continue to remain devoted in the manner described as erotic if has done so.

Socrates also indicates that the immortals refer to the necessity for wing growth, and immediately after he offers these verses he says he has indicated both the experience and the cause of eros (252c1-2), whereas before he mentioned only the experience (252b1-2). Thus Socrates implies that immortals especially are able to see the cause of eros or the condition of the human soul which makes wing growth necessary, while mortals tend to overlook it. Socrates here refers to the two views as those of immortals and mortals rather than gods and humans, calling attention to our mortality. Furthermore, immortals viewing mortals would be especially likely to note human mortality, whereas many humans, at any rate, may not be so likely to acknowledge it. Finally, the immortals' awareness of this cause is paired with their denial of eros' flight, which, in the terms of the palinode is impossible for humans because of their bodies, i.e., our mortality. It thus seems that Socrates traces the source of eros to mortality, and we have seen that eros gives rise to such devotion as may alleviate one's concern for mortality. We may therefore suggest that the initial fear on which awe depends is fear of death, in particular.

Furthermore, we may suggest that beauty, such beauty as also arouses hope and awe, arouses this fear, because in its presence we may be sufficiently encouraged to acknowledge our deepest fears, as Socrates' reference to the mortal view of eros implies we usually are not. In this case, lovers, while not necessarily fully aware of the cause of their experience, despite the experience's beginning with a fear that points to it, at least surpass those so corrupted as to be closed off from the experience, for by so closing themselves they also foreclose an opportunity for becoming more deeply aware of the condition to which it is a response. And this is an awareness which many may be lacking, for it is an awareness which begins with the fear the new initiate feels at the sight of beauty, evidently a fear which he avoided confronting until that time, a fear which he could only acknowledge in the presence of awe-and hope-inspiring beauty, and which, we may suspect, the corrupt more persistently avoid (cf. 249e4-250a4).

Eros and Education

It is then the education to which eros may lead that Socrates now discusses. Having indicated the cause of eros, Socrates now turns to a condition and activity of lovers which precedes their falling in love, although they may not be fully aware of it. Each of the uncorrupted lives out his life honoring and imitating the god he followed to the extent of his ability, acting this way towards both beloveds and others (252d1-5). Socrates seems to mean that each tries to live as seems to him most in keeping with the demands of the gods, allowing that different kinds of people experience the gods

differently.¹⁰⁵ Socrates limits this life in accord with the divine to one's first life here, as long as one remains uncorrupted (252d2-3), implying that one's memory of the gods is not sufficient to survive either corruption here or the justice of punishments and rewards administered in the afterlife, or, if Socrates does not believe in the afterlife, that an incorrect view of divine justice may suffice to render one's imitation of a god impossible. Nevertheless, a perfect view of the god is not needed at the outset, for Socrates indicates that lovers will seek to discover their god's nature under the influence of love (252e5-253a2).

Each seeks and picks out from among the beautiful someone of his type, i.e., someone who followed the same god as he has (252d5-6, 252e1-2, 253b1-4). Then each "constructs and adorns" his beloved as god into a statue for himself (252d6-7). This statue construction means, however, that each lover must seek to educate his beloved to be as like his god as possible (252e4-5). To do so, the lover must himself first learn the nature of his god, and thus his love "intensely compels" him to investigate the god (252e5-253a2). Socrates says almost nothing about how such an investigation may be undertaken, saying only that lovers learn from wherever they can, "taking the tracks from themselves (*ichneuontes para heauton*) to discover the nature of their god" (*ibid.*). What Socrates emphasizes is that the investigation is made by each lover himself, not relying on any authorities. The lover is thus on his own in this investigation. Such an investigation is possible because the lover, like all men, has seen those knowable beings

¹⁰⁵ That the division of lives according to the amount of truth seen, in which there are nine kinds of life, cannot correspond to the division according to the god followed, in which there are twelve kinds, implies that one's vision of the gods does not strictly correspond to the amount of truth one has seen; Cf. Burger (1980, 59).

on which the divinity of his god depends (249e4-5). This suggests that the thought of a lover who completes this inquiry must come to be near those beings that are the source of the god's divinity, i.e., the lover must become a philosopher (cf. 249c4-6). It is here then that Socrates indicates the connection between eros and philosophy: the lover is compelled by his desire to perfect his beloved to attend to the likenesses of justice, moderation, and those other beings, for it is only in the light of these that he may understand true perfection (cf. 249c6-8). Love provides the encouragement needed to attend to those dimmer images of the beings and discover the truth of what they imitate.¹⁰⁶

The account of love and education is not, however, without puzzles, especially when compared to the prior depiction of the erotic experience. Rather than simply being struck by beauty, the lover here, perhaps unbeknownst to himself, is already seeking a beloved, and while he chooses one from among the beautiful, he looks to qualities of soul in making his selection (252e1-2). The lover's perception of his beloved's beauty is then colored by his concern for the beloved's soul. Yet this concern for the soul stems from the lover's previous reverence for a god, whereas in Socrates' first depiction, falling in love seemed to be the beginning of reverence. This discrepancy, as well as the lover's being struck by beauty despite his already seeking a beloved from among the beautiful, can be explained if the lover is not fully aware of his concern for the god prior to his

¹⁰⁶ As it is by following the gods that Socrates indicates we view the beings, we may infer that it is not only the desire to perfect the beloved but also the hopefulness attending that desire, a hopefulness stemming from the lover's newly aroused concern for the divine, that encourages his study of the beings. Perhaps the need for hopefulness in such an investigation may be clarified by a contrast with Alcibiades' failure to complete the investigation of justice (cf. *Alcibiades I*, especially 114eff. with Bruell 1999, 27-30, paragraph 9).

falling in love; it is the sight of beauty and the feelings of fear, hope, and awe aroused by that sight which fully awakens the lover to his concern for the gods. In his initial sight of the beloved's beauty, the lover, regarding his beloved as both a statue and a god, is still not free from confusion, and thus the lover's attempt to fashion his beloved into a statue of a god, is presumably not an activity of which the lover is fully aware. The lover delights in having found something worthy of his dedication, thus becoming aware of his concern for the gods, yet he also senses the imperfection of the object of his love and wishes to perfect it. The lover seems disinclined, at least initially, to admit the imperfection of his beloved. This makes sense, for to admit his beloved's imperfection is to raise the question of whether he is truly worthy of such dedication, and, since it is the beloved's imperfection which makes the lover's dedicated service necessary or beneficial to the beloved, the question also arises as to whether perfect gods would be such as to demand such dedication. Therefore, Socrates' presentation leads us to ask whether the lover may distinguish his beloved from the gods in a manner resisted by his initial erotic experience and still regard his dedication to an imperfect beloved as befitting his life in accordance with the gods.

The answer to this question depends on what the lover who discovers the nature of his god learns. Since such a lover would have become a philosopher and since Socrates indicates in this context that the philosophers are the followers of Zeus (252e2-3, cf. 253b1-2),¹⁰⁷ it seems we should look to them. The question of whether a lover

¹⁰⁷ Zeus cannot be the philosophic god by virtue of his having seen the beings, for all the gods except Hestia have done so; rather, Zeus was distinguished from the other gods by his putting them in their ranks (246e4-247a4), and thus Zeus seems to know the proper place of each god, which again suggests that philosophers are to be distinguished by their knowledge about the gods.

could gain clarity about his god and remain devoted to his beloved is then not a question of whether philosophers would continue to serve or educate their beloveds. For Socrates indicates that after discovering their god's nature the followers of Zeus cherish the beloved still more (for aiding in this discovery), and they try to educate him (253a5-b1), just as Socrates later indicates that lovers who have become philosophers remain together in philosophic friendship (256a7-b1, cf.256c7). The question is only whether such devotion as is characteristic of lovers is compatible with the philosophic view of the gods. Socrates makes only one rather elusive statement about the distinctive character of the followers of Zeus besides indicating that these are the philosophers. At the outset of the passage we are considering, he says that the followers of Zeus may bear "a heavier burden (*embrithesteron achthos*) of the wing-named one" (252c3-4).¹⁰⁸ Socrates does not say in what the burden of eros consists, but he illustrates it by a contrast with those who are "servants of Ares and went around with him" (252c4-5),¹⁰⁹ who, when in love and supposing themselves to have been done an injustice by their beloved are murderous and ready to sacrifice both themselves and their beloved (252c5-7). The followers of Ares are incapable of bearing disappointment in love or at least such disappointment as stems from the apparent injustice of their beloved. The burden of finding someone worthy of devotion may be too much for them; yet, these lovers do not simply give up on devotion, for they are still prepared to sacrifice themselves. It is unclear whether the followers of Zeus are less troubled by their beloved's injustice so as to be less inclined to regard injustice as meriting punishment or whether they simply do not regard their

¹⁰⁸ It now appears that wing, which was to lead the heavy (*embrithes*) up (246d6), is itself a heavy burden.

¹⁰⁹ See the *men...de* at 252c3-4.

beloveds' actions, even when harmful, as unjust. But both cases are supported by Socrates' indication that it is these who learn the nature of their god, for such learning requires at its outset, as we have seen, some understanding of the gods' justice, and, by such learning, they presumably come to know the gods' justice. Thus, Socrates indicates that the followers of Zeus better bear the burden of eros in virtue of their superior justice, which means, their superiority in imitating the gods' justice or minding their own business, a superiority which Socrates also indicates here by referring to the "followers" of Zeus on one hand and the "servants" of Ares on the other. In this case, however, it does not seem that the philosophers could justly give up all their other concerns in dedication to their beloveds (cf. 252a5-6). While Socrates then suggests that philosophic justice prevents specifically erotic dedication, we should also note what he emphasizes: the philosopher's justice frees him from the temptation toward such injustice as may harm a beloved.¹¹⁰

Eros and Sexual Desire

Socrates has thus argued that the lover's sight of his beloved is such as to nourish his wings, facilitating devotion to his beloved and awakening him to his concern for the gods, which concern, fully thought out, leads one into philosophy. Yet it has remained a mystery, up to this point, why this response to the beautiful attends human sexuality in particular. That is, humans see beauty in many forms and seek friendships and

¹¹⁰ Cf. 256b1 with c7-d3: non-philosophic lovers require pledges of trust which are unnecessary for philosophic friends.

community besides that of a sexual partner, and we must therefore ask why it is the sight of beauty, coupled as it is by eros with sexual attraction, that is the source of wings.

Therefore, as Socrates finishes his praise of eros, he explains the role of sexual desire, by turning to the lover's "capture" of his beloved (253c6), for this possession of the beloved by the lover is motivated, in the first place, by sexual desire (cf. 253d5ff.).

Socrates begins by recalling his threefold image of the soul and now explains what he omitted before: the virtue of the good horse and the badness of the bad one (253c7-d3). Socrates does not, however, tell us which horse is which; it is true that earlier he called one, the white horse as it now appears (253d4-e1), "beautiful and good" (246b2-3), while the other had a share of badness (247b3), but his description of each horse here, while tending to confirm the prior suggestion, is not sufficient to remove all doubt. For while the black horse is disobedient and hubristic, his snub nose cannot but remind us of Socrates, whereas the white horse's love of honor (*times erastes*) and companionship with opinion seem dissimilar (253d3-e5).¹¹¹ Furthermore, in the depiction of love to come, the black horse plays an essential role, and without him there would be no eros. It is thus not implausible that Socrates begins only ambiguously chastising the black horse, for if eros is good, so must the black horse be.

Socrates now offers his third account of falling in love, and in this account, as in the second, Socrates indicates the state of soul preceding love, although the piety of this state is no longer the theme. Now, before feeling fear and awe, before seeing his beloved

¹¹¹ Cf. Burger (1980, 65); Benardete (1991, 149-150).

and recalling true beauty, Socrates says the lover's soul, upon seeing "the erotic eye,"¹¹² is heated and filled with the goads and tickling of yearning, as one horse feels shame and the other compels him and the charioteer to proposition the boy for sexual favors (253e5-254a7). The charioteer and white horse resist the black horse, viewing the desire for sex as "terrible and unlawful" (254a7-b1). The lover is thus conflicted due to his sexual desire on one hand and his respect for the law and shame on the other as he approaches the boy. When he comes before the boy, the boy's face "flashes like lightning," and the lover recalls the nature of beauty, now together with moderation, "standing on a chaste pedestal, and seeing he is afraid, and he falls back feeling awe" (254b3-8). It is no surprise that moderation now appears to the lover, driven as he is by what he must regard as immoderate sexual desire, but we need not conclude that his fear is therefore one of acting immoderately towards the beloved, having already felt awe at moderation. Rather, recalling the priority Socrates indicated of fear to awe, which he repeats also here, we must now try to explain the fear on the basis of the new indication that sexual desire and lawful restraint attend the fearsome sight of beauty.

At the sight of beauty, the sexually aroused lover is likely to experience delight at the contemplation of the act he desires, but, given his lawful beliefs, which tell him he is above such acts, he is especially likely also to regard his sexual desire in terms similar to Socrates' earlier description: that is, as seeking pleasure after the manner of a beast (250e4-5). The thought of a life lived for such pleasures, a beastly life, especially when

¹¹² By calling the beloved's eye erotic, Socrates seems to point to the lover's desire for his love to be reciprocated; the eyes are where longing for the lover will eventually enter the beloved (255b5-7), and by seeing the beloved's eye, the lover may feel some hope for reciprocation, especially since it seems to be above all by the eyes that we judge another's feelings.

the peak of what that life has to offer appears near to attainment,¹¹³ is dissatisfying and may well come with thoughts of the limits of such a life, and therewith the fear of death.¹¹⁴ Sexual desire in an uncorrupted soul, especially when the object of that desire flashes before one, may be especially likely to remind one of that fear which is a precondition for the hope and awe of lovers. If the lover also considers the role of sex in reproduction, as Socrates earlier indicated (250e5), he may be all the more likely to consider the natural limits to his own life, as he will be replaced by another.

Awe follows the fear, and as Socrates' mention of moderation here highlights, the beloved's beauty is such as to both arouse and inhibit sexual desire, calling the lover to devote himself not only to the beloved but also to the virtue of moderation, which he also may be inclined to do through his increased awareness of his beloved's moderation or chastity (cf. 255a4-6). The growth of wing is therefore painful not only because of the soul's resistance to wing and the absence of the beloved, but also because the growth of wing includes both the arousal of sexual desire and the painful opposition to it, for the black horse is painfully stopped by the charioteer's response to the sight of beauty (254b8-c6). The black horse is soon insistent upon sex again, and the lover thus approaches his beloved again and "suffers the same experience still more" (254c6-e1). The lover's feeling of awe thus increases with his increased sexual advances; with each pursuit, the lover becomes more aware of his beloved's beauty and his own need for moderation.

¹¹³ Cf. 256c3-5 where sex is called that choice the many regard as "blessed" (*makaristen*).

¹¹⁴ Consider also Phaedrus' disparagement of the bodily pleasures and Socrates' subsequent indication, through his myth of the cicadas, of Phaedrus' attraction to a death which comes unnoticed (258e1-259c2).

After many such experiences of the beloved's beauty, the black horse is tamed, not by giving up sexual desire altogether (cf. 255e4-256a1), but by becoming so frightened at the sight of the beloved as not to act on it (254e5-8). It is at this point that the beloved, seeing "that he is served with all service as if equal to a god" by a lover "who has truly experienced this," accepts the lover's company (255a1-b1). The lover's attainment of moderation permits his wholehearted service of the beloved. While it may be the lover's service or use which leads the beloved to accept his company (cf. 255a7), it is the lover's goodwill, or his subordination of his own desires for the sake of the beloved, a subordination made much more manifest through his struggle with sexual desire, which soon "astounds" the beloved. Through his goodwill, the lover, or "the god-inspired (*entheon*) friend" as he is now called, surpasses all others in the friendship he offers (255b3-7). The lover thus seems to have a god within (*entheon*) in virtue of his goodwill, and, unsurprisingly, it is this goodwill which then renders the lover attractive to his beloved (cf. 256a3).

We may conclude then that the hopefulness which attends the lover's falling in love is due in no small measure to the goodwill his love demands of him, for by this goodwill he may hope to attain both his beloved and some share of divinity. But Socrates again highlights the limitation of such hope. He describes the beloved's attraction saying that the flow of beauty, which Zeus in love with Ganymede named longing, enters and fills the lover, so that the excess, as a breeze or echo springing back from something solid,¹¹⁵ is borne back into the beloved (255c1-255c7, cf. 251c6-7). It is a beautiful

¹¹⁵ Contrast the mythical portrayal of the wind at 229b4ff..

image of love's reciprocation, but the result of what it describes is a state of confusion for the beloved: "then he loves, but he is perplexed as to what he loves" (255d3). Socrates likens the beloved to one who has caught an eye disease and cannot state the cause, not noticing that he is seeing himself in a mirror in the lover (255d3-6). The lover's goodwill is nothing more than the reflection of the beloved's beauty and what that beauty means to the lover.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, the lover's condition is likened to an eye disease, which he passes to his beloved, which confirms that his own understanding of what he sees in the beloved is fundamentally inadequate: his awe before the beloved is dependent on a misunderstanding of the gods, in particular of their justice. It is not hard to see how such a misunderstanding would also attend his estimate of the goodwill which follows from his awe.

From the point of view of self-knowledge, however, the beloved's condition is even worse. He has caught the eye disease, but he cannot name its source, whereas the lover can surely name his beloved. The beloved is incapable of seeing that what he loves in the lover is nothing more than his own beauty as reflected in the lover's goodwill; the beloved resists seeing that what attracts him to the lover is the lover's love for him, for seeing this would debase his own love for the lover—the lover could not then seem divine. Furthermore, in Socrates' view, the beloved loves and suffers "the same things" in the presence and absence of his lover as the lover does, but the beloved calls and thinks his feelings for the lover are only those of friendship (255d3,6-8,e1-2). Socrates does also say that the beloved has "return-love" (*anterota*), the image of eros, and that he

¹¹⁶ Cf. Benardete (1991, 151).

desires his lover “in nearly the same way but more weakly” (255d8-e3), but this seems to mark a difference in degree between the two, rather than the difference in kind the beloved believes there to be. The beloved, therefore, unable to see or admit the source of his attraction, is unaware of how great a change his soul has undergone. This inferiority of the beloved to the lover is ultimately due to the beloved’s never having been struck by beauty. Socrates then points to the beloved’s relatively weak sexual desire at the conclusion of this passage (cf. 255e5-6 with 256a1-5), and we surmise that the lover’s greater sexual desire is not an unimportant source of his greater eros and his consequent greater clarity about that eros.

This is not to deny, however, that Socrates endorses only such sexual desire as occurs among the uncorrupted, that is, such sexual desire as occurs in those who will moderate it with some measure of chastity, as Socrates indicates at the conclusion of his speech. There, Socrates praises two ways of life, that of lovers who become philosophers and that of other lovers,¹¹⁷ and in both of these there is to be a minimum of sex: there is none for the philosophers (256a7-b3), and it should be rare for the others (256c1-7). These other lovers cannot endorse sex whole-heartedly (256c6-7), and this implies that, despite their having indulged themselves, they retain the sense that love demands something higher from them (cf. 256d1-2). The philosophers, on the other hand, display self-mastery in their constant preference for a chaste relationship with one another (cf. 256b1 with c6-7), and thus Socrates indicates that the freedom philosophy may offer

¹¹⁷ Socrates calls this second way of life “honor loving” (*philotimoi*), perhaps because of the role he has just indicated being loved, that is being esteemed or honored in some way, plays in erotic attraction.

from divine madness is far from the license for the corrupt and brutish pursuit of sexual pleasure.

The Palinode's Conclusion

Socrates then concludes his speech again praising the superiority of philosophy but also praising eros. As for the difference between the two, he says of philosophy only that neither human moderation nor divine madness can provide a greater good (256b5-7), while indicating that lovers who choose sex in the proper way carry off a prize for erotic madness (256d5-6). If this contrast were not sufficiently clear, Socrates adds that the lovers of the later group also stay together in the afterlife (256e1), whereas the philosophers' greater prize contains no such reward (256b3-7). But while we have emphasized the difference between philosophy and eros in order to counteract the misleading thrust of Socrates' rhetoric, we must not overlook the fact that Socrates also genuinely praises eros, and the reason for such praise is not only the ennobling delight of eros that Socrates has described, which from virtually every point of view renders love a blessing, but it is also the claim lovers may make to a truer awareness of themselves than those too dissolute to experience love's charms. For as we saw in the case of the beloved, whose capacity to reciprocate love marks him as far from the most unfortunate, many, perhaps all human beings feel, more or less dimly, the longings at the root of love, but not all become fully aware of them. Many, perhaps fearing to admit the full extent of these longings and thus confront the difficult question of the possibility of their

fulfillment, never really come to experience them so fully as lovers do, and they thus remain in the dark about what they deeply desire.

Chapter Two: Conclusion

We began our study of Socrates' praise and blame of eros in the *Phaedrus* with a question from our study of the *Republic* as to whether and how eros is related to religious beliefs, and Socrates' palinode has gone some distance towards answering this question. The palinode does this by making the growth of the soul's wings, by which the soul is taken to the gods, central to his depiction of the erotic experience, the experience of falling in love. Socrates thereby confirms that eros is bound to religious belief and deepens our understanding of this bond by suggesting that eros is in fact a source of religious belief. By so doing, he makes it easier to understand why he would have wished to destroy the erotic attachments of the guardians, for by removing the possibility of forming erotic attachments, Socrates would remove an important foundation of such religious belief as would render the guardian's acceptance of the theology of book two, the theology suited to philosophic rule, impossible.

By noting the connection Socrates suggests between eros and religious belief, we are also better prepared to understand the relation between Socrates' first and second speeches. Both speeches, as we have seen, suggest that there is a life higher than that of a lover, the philosophic life, and the irrational religious beliefs to which eros gives rise are the reason that a philosopher must cease to be a lover in the strict sense. These irrational religious beliefs also explain why eros merits both praise and blame. Seen from the point

of view of philosophy, eros is deficient; the error in which lovers live cannot be wholeheartedly affirmed by the philosopher. But still, as the palinode also makes clear, the error in which lovers live may be conducive to a philosophic education. The awareness of mortality that lies at the bottom of the lover's religious beliefs, even if it is not made entirely explicit, brings lovers closer to the truth. Furthermore, lovers' concern for the gods and their beloveds, together with their awareness of their incomplete understanding of the gods, may spur them on to an investigation of their own moral and religious beliefs, at the end of which they may know themselves and the world far better than they did before they first fell in love. Finally, with this insight into the ambiguous character of love we can better understand why Plato prefaces Socrates' two statements on love with that of Lysias. Lysias' criticism of lovers masks an appeal to the concern for virtue and friendship with an appeal to self-interest, which means its appeal depends on the unwillingness of some nonlovers to either admit openly their concern for something beyond their own interest or to simply pursue their own self-interest. Therefore, by understanding Lysias' speech, we understand the defectiveness of these nonlovers whose lack of eros has not been attained through philosophic self-knowledge. Thus, Lysias' speech, by pointing to such nonlovers, helps us understand the genuine superiority of lovers as Socrates presents it in his palinode.

Chapter Three: Socrates' *Symposium* Speech

Introduction: On the *Symposium*'s Relation to the *Phaedrus*

A preliminary reading of Socrates' speech in the *Symposium* confirms the conclusion we drew in our studies of the *Phaedrus* and *Republic* that there is a connection between eros and religious belief. Eros is classified as one of the forms of divine madness in the *Phaedrus* (*Phdr.* 244a5-245c1), and its role is to spur the growth of the soul's wings (*Phdr.* 251bff.), which wings, in turn, carry the soul to the gods (*Phdr.* 246d6-7). In his *Symposium* speech, Socrates replaces divine madness with the demonic realm: eros is defined as a *daimon* (202d13, 203a7-8), and its function is to facilitate all interaction between gods and human beings (202e2ff); it is through *daimones* that the whole art of the priests, prophecy, and sorcery take place, as well as all association and conversation from gods to human beings (202e7-203a3). It is true that, just as in the *Phaedrus*, where eros is considered one of a variety of forms of divine madness, the *Symposium* refers to many *daimones*, but eros is the only *daimon* ever mentioned, and we are therefore entitled to suspect that it has the same privileged place in Plato's account of the origins of religious belief here as it does in the *Phaedrus*, where eros' capacity to spur wing growth is the source of such religious belief as provides a basis for the other forms of divine madness.

While confirming the *Phaedrus*' teaching regarding the connection between religion and eros, the *Symposium* is considerably more open than the *Phaedrus* about the limits of such religious hopes as eros may arouse. This greater openness of the

Symposium accords with an even more obvious difference between it and the *Phaedrus*: in the *Symposium*, the soul's immortality is implicitly denied (cf. 208a7-b2).¹ As we saw in the palinode, Socrates professed to believe in the soul's immortality so as to present the experience and view of lovers, including especially their religious beliefs (see pages 140-142 above); in the *Symposium*, where Socrates professes no belief in the soul's immortality, we accordingly find greater openness about the limitations of religious beliefs. Thus, Socrates makes the climax of his speech, i.e., the ladder of love, describe the purification of erotic beliefs, and at the peak of this purification he indicates that one who sees beauty truly will no longer imagine this divine beauty to partake, in any way, of a bodily shape (212a5, 211c8-d1, 211a5-7), therefore implying that all lovers who do not see true beauty do so imagine it. In other words, Socrates indicates that with the purification of eros and the sight of true beauty comes the cessation of belief in the gods as they are conventionally understood (cf. *Phdr.* 246b5-d2). More open and perhaps more fundamental is the *Symposium's* argument that eros is not a god, a position Socrates refrained from stating in the *Phaedrus* (cf. *Phdr.* 242d9, e2). Eros cannot be a god, because his lack of beauty and goodness, which follows from his desire for beautiful and good things, does not accord with the happiness or self-sufficiency characteristic of the gods (200e2-201b10, 202a6-202d5). This argument is explicitly made only about eros, but, as Socrates' mention of Agathon's suggestion that "matters were arranged by the gods through love of beautiful things" serves to highlight (201a4-5, cf. 197b3-5), the argument requires a revision of the ordinary understanding of the gods, a revision the

¹ See Hackforth (1950, 43-45).

conclusion of which is expressed by Socrates' later statement that "god does not mingle with human being" (203a1-2).² The *Symposium*, the only dialogue Plato devoted to the discussion of a god,³ presents an argument that suggests the perfection of the gods is incompatible with any desire on their part, including therefore the desire for the good of human beings. In this way, the *Symposium* openly confirms the conclusion we were forced to draw in our interpretation of the palinode that the philosopher, the one who best understands and imitates the gods, would be led by his understanding of the gods, an understanding which he attains through the inquiry into the principles of their divinity, i.e., their perfection, away from complete devotion to his beloved (see pages 169-174 above).

Thus the *Symposium's* greater openness about the limits attending the religious hopes characteristic of lovers is of a piece with the *Phaedrus's* teaching of the unerotic character of philosophy. Accordingly, the *Symposium* also provides direct confirmation of this teaching about philosophy, and it does so, in a way, far more openly. That is, if the *Symposium's* ladder of love cannot be said to indicate openly the unerotic character of philosophy—for it would seem to present philosophy as the highest form of eros—it is quite open about the tendency of philosophy to lead one away from love of another human being. Socrates' account of the ladder of love presents the education or purification of eros, according to which one turns from loving one kind of beloved to another higher kind, using each as the rung of a ladder (211c2), until one reaches the top, at which point one finally sees true beauty (209e5ff.). At the point when one turns from

² See Strauss (2001, 196).

³ See Strauss (2001, 16).

the love of a beautiful soul to the beauty of sciences, a turn after which only continued strengthening is required for the attainment of the final rung (210d6-e1), the (former) lover begins to consider the love of another human being petty and slavish (210d1-3), at least in comparison to the higher beauty on which he has now set his sights.

Furthermore, this turn to the beauty of science occurs only after the lover has investigated the beauty of laws and practices in order to make his beloved better (210c2-4). Thus the (former) lover turns away from his love of a beautiful human being only after having undertaken such an investigation as would lead him to the true view of justice, thereby confirming our interpretation of the palinode, according to which it is this view which would lead away from such love of a beloved as entails complete dedication (see again pages 169-174 above).

Now, it is true that the ladder of love could seem to compensate for its greater openness as regards the philosopher's not being fully erotic towards another human being by its suggestion that the philosopher is erotic towards a higher, truer beauty, the beautiful itself, but, if we look more closely at the description of the ladder of love, we find that no such eros of the beautiful itself is mentioned. That is, after the turn to the beauty of the sciences, there is no further mention of any eros; the beauty of the sciences and the beautiful itself are beheld, but they are not said to be loved (210b7, d4, 7e4, 211b6, c8-d1, 2-3, e1, 212a1-5).⁴ At his speech's conclusion, Socrates, it would seem, uses eros in a specific sense, i.e., its ordinary sense, according to which eros means a

⁴ See Benardete (1993, 196); Strauss (2001, 232-233).

certain kind of attraction and care for other human beings (cf. 205d1-8),⁵ and, by this usage, Socrates suggests that philosophy is unerotic in the strict sense. Thus he can conclude his speech saying only that it would not be easy to find a better helper than eros for human nature (212b3-4), whose end is philosophy (211d1-3), for if the philosophic activity were essentially the erotic fulfillment of eros, as the ladder of love could seem to suggest, then there could be no better helper than eros, nor any possibility that such a helper was dispensable.⁶

Thus, the ladder of love is the clearest source of the impression a reader might also otherwise receive that Socrates' speech in the *Symposium* offers a lesser praise of eros than his speech in the *Phaedrus*. And Socrates confirms the truth of this impression: whereas he concludes his speech in the *Phaedrus* by saying he has given eros the greatest praise of which he is capable (*Phdr.* 257a3-4), he concludes his *Symposium* speech telling Phaedrus to regard it as a praise of eros or whatever else he might wish to name it (212c1-3), leaving its status as a praise ambiguous. It is true that before beginning his speech, Socrates indicates that he will praise eros, but he does so only while explaining that a proper praise should include only the most beautiful aspects of its subject (198d3-199b4), and thus calling attention also to the fact that there are uglier aspects of eros. As we have already to some extent seen, Socrates will hardly prove incapable of calling more precise attention to eros' various limitations in the course of his praise.⁷ Why does

⁵ See Strauss (2001, 241).

⁶ See Strauss (2001, 239-240).

⁷ It is not even perfectly clear that Socrates promises to praise eros, for he indicates that a praise not only selects the most beautiful aspects of its subject but also sets them down in the most seemly manner (198d5-6), and he then says he is only willing to say the truth about eros, using terms and phrases in whatever manner they chance to occur (199b3-5).

the *Symposium* offer only this lesser praise? We may begin to answer this question by noting that the *Symposium*'s primary theme is unquestionably eros, whereas the *Phaedrus* seems to be split between the treatment of eros and that of rhetoric. Thus, Socrates' speech on eros in the *Phaedrus* is also presented as a piece of rhetoric (*Phdr.* 262c10ff.), whose purpose may be to persuade rather than to convey the truth (*Phdr.* 271c10ff.), but Socrates emphasizes that he will tell the truth in the *Symposium* (199a7-b3).

But this explanation of the *Symposium*'s greater truthfulness indicates, at most, why Plato would have presented a less truthful treatment of eros in his *Phaedrus*; it does not explain why Socrates would have spoken differently on these two occasions. To explain this, we must attend to the different dramatic contexts of Socrates' speeches. The most obvious difference in context is that Socrates' audience in the *Symposium* consists of considerably more people than in the *Phaedrus*, where only Phaedrus is present. The audience in the *Symposium* seems to be a sample of the Athenian intellectual elite,⁸ and Socrates' speech manifests a particular interest on his part in engaging not only Phaedrus (199b2-5, 208d2-6, 212b1-c3) but also Agathon and Aristophanes, the poets. For, although Socrates criticizes all the previous speakers (198c5-199a3), he makes his disagreements with the poets clear, first, by dialectically refuting Agathon (199c3-201c9, cf. 194a5-d7), then, by criticizing openly what would seem to be Aristophanes' thesis about eros (205d10-206a1, cf. 212c4-6), and tacitly rejecting Agathon's (206e2-5).⁹ Indeed, that Plato wished to make Socrates' contest with the poets a theme of the dialogue is confirmed by the dialogue's opening, where Agathon suggests such a contest

⁸ See Strauss (2001, 25).

⁹ See Strauss (2001, 206).

is coming (175e7-9), by the brief contest which occurs before Agathon's speech (194a5-d7), and by the dialogue's conclusion, where we are told that Socrates, apparently victorious in the contest, is compelling the two poets to agree that the same man would know both comedy and tragedy and that the one who was a tragic poet by art could also be a comic poet (223c4-d6).

Now, we are not told the arguments by which Socrates is able to compel the poets (223c6-d1), and the attempt to interpret the meaning of this final contest between Socrates and the poets would, as it seems to me, take us beyond our focus on eros, but perhaps we can discern something of what Socrates takes to be the superiority of his way of life to that of the poets by looking to his speech. For there, Socrates not only indicates his specific disagreements with the poets about eros, but he also implicitly criticizes their way of life. That is, Socrates presents poetry as one form of the pursuit of fame, indeed, the highest, when it is practiced by the greatest poets (209a4, 209c7-d4), and insofar as a poet is content to live for the pursuit of fame,¹⁰ Socrates indicates that he settles for a less adequate fulfillment of his eros than does a philosopher who ascends the ladder of love (cf. 209b7-c2 with 210c1-3). Socrates therefore indicates that the poets live with insufficient attentiveness to the lack which eros seeks to fulfill (cf. 200d8-10). Without sufficient attentiveness to this lack, the poets would then be disposed to misconstrue the manner in which eros attempts to fill this lack (cf. 203b7-8, 206e7-207a4), which explains Socrates' criticisms of their theses about eros. Furthermore, as they confirm by their choice of an erotic life based on fame, the poets fail to see with clarity the

¹⁰ Contrast *Phaedrus* 276c3-277a4, where Socrates argues that one who knows the just, beautiful, and good things may write, but only as a sort of play which is subordinate to philosophic learning and instruction.

defectiveness of eros as a response to this need, a defectiveness which permits or requires the ascent beyond eros that Socrates describes in the ladder of love. Thus, Socrates' wish to engage with the poets and show the inferiority of poetry to philosophy may have compelled him to indicate more clearly the limitations of eros in this dialogue.

Socrates' *Symposium* speech is, however, more directly a response to Phaedrus' request for a praise of eros than it is an address to the poets (177a4-c4, 194d1-8), and immediately before giving his speech, Socrates makes sure that Phaedrus in particular would like to hear the truth about eros (199b2-5). We must therefore raise the question of how the teaching Socrates gives Phaedrus in the *Symposium* is to be understood in relation to Socrates' attempt to educate him in the *Phaedrus*. To answer this question, it would be of great help to know the dramatic dates of the two dialogues so as to assess the order in which Socrates attempts to instruct Phaedrus. In the case of the *Symposium*, Agathon's victory establishes a clear date of 416 for the original presentation of the speeches (173a5-7),¹¹ but the *Phaedrus* offers no such clear evidence of its date. Indeed, it would seem that such references as Plato provides to various historical figures in the *Phaedrus* render impossible the attempt to establish a precise date: the dialogue would have had to occur before 415 or after 403, because Phaedrus was exiled in the intervening years; it would seem to be impossible for the dialogue to occur after 403, for Socrates seems to speak of Sophocles, Euripides, and Lysias' brother, Polemarchus, as if they are alive (257b3-4, 268c5ff.), and the two poets died in 406 while Polemarchus died in 404; yet if the dialogue is to occur before 415, it is hard to understand Socrates' praise of

¹¹ See Henderson (2001, 78); Strauss (2001, 18); Nails (2002, 315).

Isocrates' rhetorical skills, for although Socrates says he is still young, it is hard to see how he would have merited such praise at approximately the age of twenty, as he would have been in 415 (278e10ff.), and it is also hard to see how Simmias, who is called young in the *Phaedo* (89a), which takes place in 399, could have already been the cause of many speeches as Socrates says he was in the *Phaedrus*.¹² Still, even if Plato felt free to refer in the *Phaedrus* to historical events or people in a manner that is inconsistent with historical fact, as he clearly did in his other dialogue devoted to rhetoric, the *Gorgias*,¹³ he chose one character, Phaedrus, to link his two dialogues on eros together, and he therefore seems to raise a question for his readers about the effect of Socrates' teaching on Phaedrus. This question can only be answered by some indication of the order in which Phaedrus received Socrates' teachings, and it would therefore seem that it can only be answered through a consideration of the order in which it would make sense for Socrates to offer his two teachings.¹⁴ That is, it seems to me we must consider the content of what Socrates teaches in the two dialogues and its relation to Phaedrus' character, in order to determine the order in which it would make sense for Socrates to have presented these teachings to Phaedrus.

At the outset of the *Phaedrus*, as we have seen, Phaedrus praises an unerotic or anti-erotic speech (*Phdr.* 235b1-5) and expresses doubts about the conventional beliefs in

¹² See Hackforth (1952, 8); Nussbaum (1986, 229-230); Rowe (1986, 13-14); Lutz (1990, 52); Nehamas and Woodruff (1995, xiii); Strauss (2001, 18-19); Nails (2002, 314).

¹³ See Dodds (1959, 17-18) on the impossibility of establishing the dramatic date of the *Gorgias*. Consider the *Menexenus* for the clearest evidence that Plato felt free to play with historical dates in his Socratic dialogues, but, here again, it seems that Plato wished us to understand something of the dramatic date of the *Menexenus*, i.e., that it would have occurred after the *Lysis*. Cf. Nails (2002, 319).

¹⁴ Thus, while I agree with Hackforth (1952, 8), Rowe (1986, 13-14), and Dodds (1959, 17-18) that Plato did not consider himself bound by historical accuracy in his dialogues' references to other people or events, I still think that he considered the dramatic dating of his dialogues important at least insofar as it affects the order in which Socrates taught others or learned certain things himself.

the gods (*Phdr.* 229c4-5, 242d10). Socrates then offers Phaedrus an enchanting praise of eros and the gods. At the outset of the *Symposium*, Eryximachus reports that Phaedrus has been repeatedly asking him why there is no famous praise for the god Eros (177a2-c4), and Phaedrus then offers a praise of his own. Socrates' response, when contrasted with his palinode, is disenchanting.¹⁵ Now, as we have seen from our interpretation of the *Phaedrus* and a preliminary interpretation of Socrates' *Symposium* speech, Socrates regards the less enchanting treatment of eros as the more truthful one, but he also regards erotic enchantment as a useful beginning in a genuine education. In this case, it makes sense that Socrates would offer the relatively unerotic Phaedrus the greatest praise of eros of which he is capable in order to arouse Phaedrus' concern with eros, before presenting the harsher truth. By this account, Socrates' palinode may be the source of Phaedrus' request for the praise of eros in the *Symposium*.¹⁶ Furthermore, I know of no reason why Phaedrus, whose long term association with sophists and doctors marks him as unlikely to be especially erotic or serious about piety,¹⁷ would have come to be concerned with a

¹⁵ Cf. Strauss (2001, 18, 53, 248). Strauss draws the opposite conclusion about the order of the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* based on a similar interpretation of Socrates' speech in the *Symposium*. Strauss apparently reasons that Phaedrus begins the *Phaedrus* without admiration of eros due to his hearing the speeches in the *Symposium*, and this presumably requires Socrates to lead Phaedrus to a somewhat more moderate view of eros, perhaps to undo the damage his speech has done. This leaves unexplained why Phaedrus had come to be so concerned with eros in the first place, as none of his companions, the sophists, evidently were (177a2-c4). Furthermore, while I agree with Strauss about the concern with "gain" that he detects in Phaedrus' *Symposium* speech (2001, 55-56, 282), this seems to me to be the result of a lingering concern with gain that has become a problem for him since hearing Socrates' palinode.

¹⁶ Cf. Lutz (1990, 23-55). Lutz offers an interpretation of Phaedrus' *Symposium* speech which presents Phaedrus as expressing admiration of lovers while doubting that there are such gods as could reward their sacrifices (see especially page 38). Such a concern on Phaedrus' part is a plausible response to the palinode, which makes prominent the lover's willingness to sacrifice to the beloved while raising the question of the character of the gods.

¹⁷ On Phaedrus' long term association with sophists, see *Protagoras* 315c, *Phaedrus* 265dff.; on the impious implications of such associations, see, for example, *Phaedrus* 229c6ff., and pages 132-133 above. Consider also Phaedrus' exile for impiety (see Nails 2002, 232-234). On Phaedrus' long-term association

praise of the god Eros on the assumption that the *Symposium* comes first. On this assumption, one must also explain why, if Phaedrus' education is of concern to Socrates, he would proceed from the more to the less true teaching. Finally, even if Socrates makes his *Symposium* speech without primarily considering Phaedrus' education, how could he then expect Phaedrus to take him seriously when he suggests that Eros is a god in the *Phaedrus* (*Phdr.* 242d9), having already so openly taught the opposite (202b6-202d7)?

If, then, the *Symposium* occurs after the *Phaedrus*, we would expect to find some trace of Socrates' earlier teaching in Phaedrus' *Symposium* speech. Without undertaking a detailed analysis of Phaedrus' speech,¹⁸ we can still see some traces of Socrates' influence. Phaedrus' reference to eros as the cause of the greatest goods echoes Socrates' description of divine madness (178c2-3, cf. *Phdr.* 244a6-7), and Phaedrus' speech concludes with a reference to lovers having a god within themselves, repeating Socrates' formulation from the palinode (180b4, *Phdr.* 255b6). More substantively, Phaedrus praises lovers despite or because of the great sacrifices which, as he explicitly notes, their love demands of them (179b4ff.), and, as we recall, this willingness to sacrifice was fundamental to Socrates' praise of eros in the palinode. Furthermore, it is also likely to be this willingness that would most strike a nonlover who has been compelled by Socrates' palinode to take lovers seriously (see especially pages 159-167 above). It is

with doctors, see *Phaedrus* 227a2-b1, 268a8-9, *Symposium* 176d5-7, 223b6-7, *Protagoras* 315c; on the unerotic implications of such an association see pages 120-122 above and Strauss (2001, 218-219).

¹⁸ See Lutz for such an analysis (1990, 23-55).

not, then, far-fetched to suppose that Phaedrus' concern about eros and the praise he gives it in the *Symposium* are the result of his encounter with Socrates in the *Phaedrus*.

When Socrates gave his palinode, he knew that Phaedrus would try to use it to provoke more speeches from others (*Phdr.* 228a5ff., 242a6-b5, 243d5-e2, 257b2-4). Socrates suggested that the primary addressee of his palinode, after Phaedrus, was Lysias (243d5-7, 257b2-4), and Plato never indicates what effect the palinode may have had on him (although cf. *Phdr.* 257c2-4), but by my hypothesis about the order of the dialogues, the *Symposium* presents something of the palinode's effect more generally: Socrates is rewarded with a night of speeches on eros and the opportunity to make his own before a new audience.

The Order of Socrates' speech

Socrates' begins his *Symposium* speech by complementing the order in which Agathon had suggested one should speak and indicating his intent to speak in that order (199c3-6, cf. 195a1-5).¹⁹ According to that order, Socrates will first discuss what sort Eros is and then he will discuss his deeds. Socrates later repeats that he is following this order (201d8-e2), and his speech roughly seems to follow it: first he indicates that Eros is a daimon, and then he indicates his use for human beings (cf. 204c5-204d2). Yet a closer inspection reveals that Socrates' indication of Eros' character is inseparable from an

¹⁹ Agathon says he will indicate Eros' gifts, which Socrates replaces with Eros' deeds, indicating again his speech's harsh treatment of eros.

account of his deeds. Thus, the very classification of Eros as a daimon is explained by reference to his power, or the role he plays as intermediary between gods and human beings (202d13ff.), and once Socrates has turned to the question of eros' use, the question of what defines eros remains (204d5-6, 205a9-b2, 206b1-4). Now, if eros were a god, as Socrates initially suggests and claims to have taken him to be (202b6-7), it would be possible to know his character, perhaps through conversation with him, independently of and prior to knowing his deeds; indeed, by such knowledge of his character one could then explain his deeds by tracing them to their cause (cf. 195a2-3). But, at the very outset of the second part of his speech, the part occurring after the explicit discussion of Eros' character, which should therefore concern Eros' deeds, Socrates drops all pretense of treating eros as an independent being, whether a god or a daimon, and treats him as an aspect of living human beings (204d3-6). In this case, eros would be inseparable from "his" deeds, taking Eros' deeds to mean the erotic activities of human beings. The speech's division occurs after the conclusion is drawn that Eros is not a god (202d7), and thus it actually seems to be divided between a disproof of Eros' divinity and an argument which shows of what use eros may be to human beings despite its lack of divinity.²⁰ Socrates' statement of the order he should follow and his subsequent failure to follow it then highlights the fact that he alone of the *Symposium* speakers explicitly rejects the conventional view that eros is a god.

²⁰ Thus, the section of the speech following the conclusion that eros is not a god and prior to the question of his use for human beings (202d8-204c6) is already an attempt by Diotima to indicate eros' use for human beings, which Socrates does not yet understand and which therefore requires the speech's second part (cf. especially 202e2-203a8). See Strauss (2001, 198).

There is an even more obvious division in Socrates' speech: the division between his conversation with Agathon, with which the speech begins, and his speaking on his own. When Socrates lets Agathon go and speaks on his own, he recounts his education under the tutelage of Diotima (201d1ff.). This education consists in a series of conversations between Socrates and Diotima (cf. 207a5-6). Thus Socrates' whole speech consists in his conversation with Agathon on the one hand and his presentation of his conversations with Diotima on the other. These two sets of conversations are united by Socrates' beginning his account of his conversations with Diotima at the point where he had left off with Agathon (201d6-8). That is, Socrates once held the same views as Agathon had, and Diotima had refuted Socrates as he had refuted Agathon (201e3-6). Thus, Socrates' conversation with Agathon presents the first stage of his education under Diotima.²¹ Why then does Socrates divide his speech between his conversation with Agathon and those with Diotima? Socrates' conversation with Agathon is primarily a refutation of Agathon, and Socrates' may have desired to make such a refutation publicly not only as part of his broader desire to compete with the poets that we have already discussed, but also to break any spell that Agathon's beautiful speech, the speech given immediately prior to Socrates', may have cast on the audience (cf. 198a1-7, b1-c5). Then why introduce Diotima after having refuted Agathon?

By presenting his education under Diotima, Socrates necessarily distances himself from its teaching: the views expressed are primarily those of Diotima. Diotima is

²¹ See Lutz (1998, 84).

apparently a fictional character,²² and Socrates attributes to her such wisdom as enables her to postpone a plague with sacrifices (201d3-5). By giving Diotima such priestly qualities, he presents a speaker who can deny the conventional religious beliefs with greater propriety than could Socrates. Thus, while Socrates leads Agathon up to the point from which the divinity of eros could be refuted (201c4-5), he leaves it to Diotima to draw the final conclusion (202d5). Socrates' presentation of his speech in the form of a series of conversations thus serves to hide his responsibility for his own teaching; he will tell the truth, but in fact he says little in his own name: his conversation with Agathon follows from the premises to which Agathon agrees (200e7-9, 201d6-7), premises which, as we shall see, Socrates no longer shares, and his conversations with Diotima show primarily her views and his youthful objections to these views.²³ Still, Socrates says at the conclusion of his speech that he is persuaded by Diotima's teaching, whereas he makes clear at numerous points throughout her teaching that he had not yet been persuaded by it. The teaching as a whole, or its final part, may therefore be regarded as satisfactory to the mature Socrates, but Socrates presumably includes the earlier stages of his education to show how they lead to or prepared him for the final stage. Thus, we must examine each earlier part of the education, trying to see how it by itself is still incomplete and thereby points to the rest.

²² See Nussbaum (1986, 177); Nehamas and Woodruff (1995, xii-xiii, 45). Cf. Dover (1980, 137).

²³ See Lutz (1998, 84).

Socrates' Refutation of Agathon

The most prominent purpose of Socrates' initial conversation with Agathon is his refutation of Agathon. Agathon's speech had asserted both that Eros is beautiful and good and that Eros loves beauty (195a7, 197b3-5, 8-9), and Socrates shows that Agathon holds that to love something implies desiring that thing and to desire is to lack what is desired (200a2-b3, e2-9). It follows quite simply then that Eros lacks beauty, and as Socrates shows, since Agathon also regards the good things as beautiful, eros lacks the good things (201a2-c5).²⁴ Thus Agathon contradicts himself. Yet Socrates' presentation of this rather straightforward argument is not quite so simple. In the middle of the argument, after indicating the "wondrous necessity" that one desire only what one lacks (200a8-b3), Socrates notes an apparent exception to this necessity (200b4-5, 9ff.), which forces him to indicate more precisely what he means by desire. This more precise determination, in turn, permits Socrates to introduce quietly a definition of eros according to which eros would not necessarily simply lack its object (200d8-10). Agathon's refutation accordingly depends on his own obliviousness to the character of eros to which Socrates is pointing. Thus we may say that the most manifest refutation of Agathon conceals a subtler criticism of his understanding of eros.

Socrates' more precise determination of what he means by desire stems from the following consideration. Someone possessing such desirable qualities as strength, speed,

²⁴ This is Socrates' first indication of the relation between beauty and goodness, which will become the primary question as the speech progresses. Socrates does not simply take for granted the relation suggested here, but makes sure that Agathon agrees to it (201c2-3). Also, Socrates' formulation allows that there may be beauties which are bad, while requiring of any good thing that it also be beautiful.

health, or wealth might suppose that despite possessing these qualities he also desires them (200b9-d7). Socrates then undertakes to correct such a person by drawing a distinction between desiring (*epithumeo*) and wishing (*boulomai*); according to this distinction, one may not desire what one already has, for one necessarily has it,²⁵ but one may wish to have in the future what one already has in the present (200c3-d6). That is, Socrates denies that one may desire to possess in the future what one already has, but allows that one may wish for it. A desire must be for what is currently lacked, and Socrates' distinction is thus between a current lack and a lack that is only expected. The distinction between desire and wish therefore has its basis in the forethought on which the expectation of a lack depends; desires may be felt simply from the lack of something, but wish requires reflection on one's condition.

After distinguishing between desire and wish, Socrates offers a definition of eros which includes both. He says, "then this is to love that, what is not yet available for him, nor what he has, these things [goods such as health, wealth, and strength] being secured and present for him in the future" (200d7-10, cf. 200c5-d6). It is a difficult statement to interpret, but it clearly suggests a complexity in the object or objects of eros: eros includes both a desire for what is not yet present and the security of such goods as may already be present. It is true that Socrates goes on to treat eros together with desire as if both were simply of what one lacks (200e2-5), but this serves rather to complete his

²⁵ Socrates argues that one cannot desire what one has because it is necessary to have it, "whether one wishes or not" (200c3-5), suggesting that one can wish not to have what one necessarily has, and thereby implying, as he later seems to confirm (cf. 205a1-7 with 206a9-10), that wishes may be for the impossible (cf. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* 1111b22-23).

refutation of Agathon. As we shall see, eros is a complex phenomenon including both desire and wish.

Although Agathon agrees to Socrates' suggestion that eros contains both simple desire and the more reflective wish (200e1), he does not object when Socrates concludes that eros is simply of what one lacks (200e7-201a1), and we therefore can see that Agathon overlooks the reflective element in eros to which Socrates has been pointing. This oversight on Agathon's part is presumably connected to the error which Socrates will later suggest attends his thesis about eros, a thesis that Socrates once shared, i.e., that eros is of the beautiful. For here, Socrates suggests that eros includes a desire for beauty (201a9-10), but also that it seeks to guarantee the permanent possession of such good things as one already has, and later Socrates or his Diotima will suggest that eros is not exactly of beauty but of begetting in the beautiful; according to this definition, the desire for beauty would only be a part of the phenomenon of eros (206e2-5, cf. 206e7-207a4). Now, in overlooking the reflective aspect of eros, Agathon draws the conclusion that eros simply lacks beautiful and good things, but it is not clear that Socrates shares this conclusion (cf. 201e7). Indeed, since wish depends on some reflection on one's condition, it entails some self-knowledge and is presumably educable in a way that mere desires are not, and it would seem to be for such self-knowledge and educability of eros as permits a lover to ascend the ladder of love that Socrates ultimately regards eros as a good possession for human beings, if not an unqualifiedly good one. Therefore, by simply identifying eros with the desire for beauty, Agathon overlooks the contribution that eros may offer to the attainment of the human good.

Eros as the Intermediate

Socrates' argument against the conclusion which has just been drawn, that eros is neither good nor beautiful, begins with the classification of eros as an intermediate being. Eros is intermediate, first of all, between beauty and ugliness, goodness and badness (202b2-5), then between mortal and immortal (202d11), and finally between wisdom and ignorance (204b4-5). That Eros is such an intermediate is the first lesson that Socrates presents himself receiving as he turns his speech explicitly to his education under Diotima. Having been shown that Eros is neither beautiful nor good as he just showed Agathon, Socrates asks Diotima if she does not therefore regard Eros as ugly and bad (201e8-9). Such a view follows if one regards anything lacking goodness and beauty as bad and ugly, and Diotima first leads Socrates to affirm emphatically that this is his view (201e10-202a1). It seems that Socrates' longing for the good and beautiful is such that it leaves him not only unsatisfied by but contemptuous of anything lacking the goodness and beauty he desires. We shall receive confirmation later that Socrates' erotic concern for the beautiful and good may lead to disregard of the more qualifiedly good and beautiful things available to us.

Diotima apparently convinces Socrates that Eros need not be bad and ugly by the analogy she offers according to which correct opinion, because it obtains truth without supporting itself with reason, is in between wisdom or knowledge and ignorance (202a2-10). That is, she shows Socrates something that attains something of what he desires (truth) but not so fully as he would most wish to attain it. While this convinces Socrates

that Eros need not be bad and ugly, it does not convince him that Eros is an intermediate. For he responds to Diotima's suggestion of the intermediate character of true opinion, perhaps encouraged by Diotima's apparent endorsement of opinion,²⁶ by saying that all believe Eros to be a great god (202b6-7). Then, when she has shown him that opinion is not simply to be trusted, and that he does not believe that Eros is a god (202b8-d7), Socrates persists in trying to find out what Eros is (202d8ff.), and he evidently remains sufficiently unsure of its intermediate status that once the part of the conversation which is to indicate Eros' sort or character is complete, he still wonders of what use Eros might be to human beings (204c7). As we could have anticipated from the above account of Socrates' dialogue with Agathon, Eros' status as an intermediate does not mean that Eros is between the beautiful and ugly and the good and the bad simply by simply being none of these, rather, Eros is intermediate since he is lacking a complete or final good or has some defect while still being useful, and in this qualified sense, good. In fact, Diotima has already indicated, if in an obscure manner, Eros' use, when she answered Socrates' question as to Eros' power as a *daimon*, the class to which she says Eros belongs after showing that he is not a god (202d13-203a8).

As already mentioned, the argument that Eros is not a god follows easily from the conclusions Socrates was led to draw when he was refuted as Agathon had been, but the manner in which Diotima shows Socrates that Eros is not a god makes clear exactly which of his beliefs prevent Socrates from holding on to his belief that Eros is a god.²⁷ Diotima shows Socrates that his conviction that Eros desires and therefore lacks beautiful

²⁶ See Lutz (1998, 85).

²⁷ Cf. Lutz (1998, 85-86).

and good things, and his conviction that gods, being happy, possess beautiful and good things, together render it impossible to maintain his belief that eros is a god (202c6-d7). That is, Socrates maintains his belief in the attributes conventionally ascribed to Eros and he maintains his belief in the perfection ascribed to the gods, and therefore he must give up his belief that Eros is a god. Neither Diotima nor Socrates explain why Socrates must retain the particular opinions which he does, but we may wonder if any other response could be consistent with religious belief. If Socrates denied the perfection of the gods, could he still hold such imperfect gods as worthy of worship or even of being called gods (cf. 202c7-8)? And if he denied the deeds conventionally ascribed to Eros, what, if anything, could “Eros” still mean to him when he believed “Eros” to be a god? As indicated above, by recalling Agathon’s earlier suggestion that the other gods also desire beauty (201a4-5, 197b3-5), we can see the implications of the considerations Diotima raises for conventional piety in general.

These implications manifest themselves in Socrates’ speech almost immediately. First, when Diotima tells Socrates that Eros is a *daimon*, she explains the need for *daimones* to act as intermediaries between gods and human beings, by noting that gods do not mingle with human beings (203a1-2); we infer that gods would not so mingle because of their perfection.²⁸ If we consider, however, that this perfection requires that gods not desire, and therefore that they desire nothing of or for human beings, then it is hard to see why gods would care for human prayers or offerings or have any commandments or requitals for humans, regardless of Eros’ activity as an intermediate

²⁸ See Lutz (1998, 87).

(cf. 202e3-5). Diotima then confirms that she has followed out this reasoning by the story she tells next of Eros' birth.

According to this story, Eros descends from Resource, the god, and Poverty or Need (*Penia*) (203c5, b2-3). It is clear that Need is not a goddess (203b2-4), and, as her name suggests, she is distinguished by her poverty (203b4, 7-8, c6-d3), which seems to mark her as a mortal. Whatever she may be, it is necessary for Resource to act very much unlike a true god, getting drunk and falling asleep in Zeus' garden, for Need to produce a child with him (203b5-c1).²⁹ It seems to be necessary that eros descend from both Need and Resource, because otherwise Eros would seem to be simply impoverished and therefore incapable of fulfilling his role as intermediary (cf. 203c5ff.), but Diotima undermines the understanding of Need as pure poverty by her description of Need's activity. According to Diotima, Need "*contriving because of her own lack of means to make a child from Resource, lay down beside him and conceived Eros*" (203b7-c1). Need turns out to be quite resourceful, and it is unclear what role, if any, Resource actually plays in Eros' origin; Need merely lies down beside him. Diotima's story of Eros' birth therefore suggests not only that it is not possible for an imperfect being like Eros to descend from a god, but also that mere Need, since she is aware of her neediness, may suffice as a parent of Eros. Thus, when Diotima lists Eros' traits, she refers to Eros' having his mother's nature (203d3), but she never says he has his father's nature,³⁰ referring only to some of Eros' traits, traits which emphasize his resourcefulness but

²⁹ See Lutz (1998, 87).

³⁰ We shall see later why Diotima does refer to Eros' coming back to life "by means of the nature of his father" (203e3).

could believably stem from his mother, according to Diotima's description of her,³¹ as being in accord with his father (203d4-8). It is therefore possible that Eros has entirely mortal origins.³²

Thus, the proof that Eros is not a god proves to be the beginning of a development at whose conclusion eros comes to be treated merely as a characteristic or activity of human beings. That is, after Diotima has explained Eros' character and origin, we find the following passage. Diotima asks Socrates "in what respect is Eros of beautiful things" (204d4)? Perhaps Socrates by now can no longer understand the question, referring as it appears to do to Eros as an independent being; in any event, Diotima rephrases it, saying, "but this way is clearer: the one loving the beautiful loves—, what does he love?" (204d5-6). Diotima no longer treats eros as a being, whether a god or a *daimon*, which itself loves; instead she treats eros as the longing of human lovers,³³ and eros is treated in this way for the remainder of the speech. According to Diotima's proof that eros is not a god, it is impossible for immortals to mix and therefore, it would seem, to reveal themselves to human beings. In this case, a question arises as to the origin of human belief in such gods as would reveal themselves. A strictly human origin of the gods must be discovered. Diotima accordingly answers this question by pointing to eros; Diotima's description of eros after she has proved that it is not a god, that is, her description of eros' *daimonic* power, suggests that eros is the human longing which provides for such belief in the gods as provides a basis for "all divination...and the art of

³¹ See Strauss (2001, 194, 227).

³² Cf. Strauss (2001, 193-195).

³³ Cf. Strauss (2001, 199).

the priests, of those concerning sacrifices, rites, enchantments, and the whole of divination and sorcery” (202e7-203a1). In this case, Diotima’s earlier indication that eros is neither mortal nor immortal but intermediate between the two can only mean that eros is responsible for such beliefs as humans have in immortals (202d8-11, 203d8-e1). For, however many times eros may die and come back to life, as Diotima asserts it does (203e1-3), these deaths and rebirths are of a human’s longing, and therefore eros is ultimately as mortal as each of the beings of which it is an attribute or activity.

Taking eros as a human longing, we can also begin to interpret Diotima’s suggestion about eros’ relation to Aphrodite. Diotima claims that Eros was born on Aphrodite’s birthday (203c1-3), and, since we are taking eros to be a human longing we seem to be entitled to treat Aphrodite similarly, taking her to represent *aphrodisia*, or sexual pleasure. Diotima gives two reasons that Eros is a follower of Aphrodite: first, he is born on her birthday, and secondly, he is concerned with the beautiful and she is beautiful (203c1-4). Eros’ connection with sexual pleasure is therefore in the first place accidental:³⁴ the onset of sexual desire (which brings with it the anticipation of sexual pleasure) happens to provide an opportunity for our need to become aware of itself, and this response to our neediness is eros (cf. 206c3-4, 209b2-3). Secondly, the beauty of sexual pleasure or, more likely, the beauty of the beloved with whom one seeks such pleasure plays a crucial role, as we shall have eventually to explain, in permitting us to acknowledge our neediness, and the manner in which it permits this acknowledgment

³⁴ See Strauss (2001, 192-193).

determines much of the character of the erotic experience (cf. 206c4-5, 209b3-4).³⁵ Thus eros is hardly identical to sexual desire, and Diotima emphasizes rather eros' role in leading us to the gods (cf. *Phdr.* 250e1ff., 246d6-7).

In this section of the speech, however, Diotima also calls attention to another role of eros, a role which Socrates could more unqualifiedly regard as useful, i.e., a philosophic role. The traits Diotima ascribes to eros seem to be not merely those appropriate to a description of resourceful neediness; they also seem to describe Socrates, in particular: Eros is poor, tough, shoeless, desirous of and well-provided with practical wisdom, plotting to obtain the beautiful and the good (203c6-d7, cf. 174a3-4, 213b9-c5, e3-4, 220a1ff., 223a6-9).³⁶ And eros' always being at home with need reminds of Socrates' famous self-knowledge, i.e., his awareness of his ignorance (cf. *Apology* 21b-23c). Eros is between wisdom and ignorance, and we learn that this too is where philosophers dwell (203e5-204a4). Finally, we are told that eros is a philosopher (203d7, 204b2, 4).

When Diotima claims that Eros is a philosopher, it is in response to Socrates' question, "who are the philosophers?" (204a8-9). It is not immediately clear why Socrates asks this question here, in the midst of a treatment of eros' character, but it comes immediately after Diotima's claim, which Socrates repeats in asking the question, that philosophers are neither wise nor ignorant, but aware of their ignorance (204a1-9). When we recall Diotima's earlier suggestion that it is correct opinion that is between wisdom and ignorance (202a2-9), it appears that Socrates wonders how such knowledge

³⁵ Cf. Lutz (1998, 88).

³⁶ Cf. Lutz (1988, 88).

of ignorance as characterizes philosophers differs from any other correct opinion, for surely some have correct opinions without being philosophers. Diotima's response, however, does nothing to remedy this confusion, for she does not distinguish the philosophers, instead claiming that Eros is one of them and repeating the formula that philosophy is between wisdom and ignorance (204b1-5).³⁷ Diotima does, however, give a reason for Eros' being a philosopher, and this reason indicates something of the connection between eros and philosophy. She says, "for wisdom is of the most beautiful things, and Eros is love concerning the beautiful, so that it is *necessary* for Eros to be a philosopher" (204b2-4). This could seem to mean that because wisdom is among the most beautiful things, and because Eros loves beauty, one form of eros must be eros of wisdom, i.e., philosophy.³⁸ But it would not be *necessary* that eros be a philosopher if wisdom were only one of the most beautiful things. We therefore should interpret the sentence to mean that wisdom is of or about the most beautiful things. In this case, Eros would seek to obtain wisdom, i.e., to philosophize, because Eros is not merely concerned with beauty, but, as Diotima also tells us in the passage, its object, the beloved, is the *truly* beautiful (*to toi onti kalon*), and therefore eros would need wisdom about beauty in order to distinguish true from merely apparent beauties (cf. 212a3-5). With eros must come something of the philosophic concern to discover the truly beautiful.

Diotima's discussion of eros' character does not fail, however, to raise a question as to the extent to which eros may be philosophic. Diotima allows that wisdom is possible for human beings (204a1, 203a4-6), and indeed, she seems to point to such

³⁷ Cf. Strauss (2001, 195).

³⁸ Cf. Dover (1980, 143).

wisdom as the mature Socrates claims to possess in her discussion of eros' *daimonic* power. That is, while deprecating all other wisdom as vulgar, Diotima praises the one who is wise concerning the *daimonic* realm as a *daimonic* man (203a4-6). These *daimonic* men are not those whose *art* works through the action of the *daimones*, as that of the priests does (cf. 202e7-8 with 203a5). Socrates' claim to possess knowledge of eros apparently then refers to his possession of precisely this *daimonic* wisdom (177d7-8, 198d1-2).³⁹ Unless one wishes to deny that Socrates is a philosopher, it seems one must admit that philosophers may be wise in some matters while only being aware of their ignorance about others. Indeed the ladder of love, by inserting philosophy at the point where one sees the beauty of the sciences and something of the truth about beauty (210c6-d6), seems to suggest that philosophy is characterized by the possession of some wisdom about beauty. On the other hand, Diotima's characterization of eros as such a thoroughgoing intermediate would seem to speak against eros' ever attaining wisdom (203e3-5). That is, while Diotima brings out eros' awareness of its neediness as a philosophic aspect of eros, her indication of eros' failure to attain wisdom seems to mark eros' awareness of its need as an incomplete awareness. Furthermore, Diotima suggests that eros is not only such as to arise when one believes that one is in need, but also that eros only arises when the resources needed for its fulfillment appear to be available; she says that Eros lives when he has resources (203e2). Since, however, eros is by nature never fulfilled (203c6, d3, 203e3-5), we must wonder if those resources which give eros life are genuine resources; they are never sufficient resources to fill his need. Diotima

³⁹ Cf. *Theages* 128b1-4; *Lysis* 204b5-c2; *Charmides* 155d4-e2.

would seem to confirm that they are not genuine resources, at least not all of them, when she says that after Eros dies (apparently from lack of resources), he then comes back to life again “by means of the nature of his father” (203e2-3). For Eros’ father, we recall, was a fictitious god, and, while it makes sense that the belief in such a god could provide eros the encouragement needed to flourish, i.e., that the assistance of a such a god would permit eros’ fulfillment, Diotima and Socrates have argued that such a god is impossible. And Diotima confirms that the erotic need is ultimately for such a god by concluding this section of the speech saying that what Socrates believed eros to be was in fact the object of eros, for Socrates took eros to be not only “beautiful, graceful, perfect, and blessed” but also a caring god (204c1-5, cf. 201e3-5, 202b6-7).

Diotima’s refusal in this section of the speech to distinguish the philosophers from others with correct opinion is therefore in keeping with her presentation of Eros as a philosopher,⁴⁰ for eros is only ambiguously philosophic. As the awareness of a need and therefore a form of self-knowledge, eros is philosophic. On the other hand, eros is an incomplete awareness of a need because it comes with the irrational hope for the need’s fulfillment, and it is therefore an incomplete awareness because it is not aware of the irremediable character of the need. Thus, Diotima says not only that eros is a philosopher but also that he is a “terrible sorcerer, druggist, and sophist” (203e8). Diotima’s indication of the incompleteness of the erotic awareness of need is therefore the first step towards explaining eros’ other role, that of linking men to the gods. It is only the first step because Diotima will have to indicate not only the human need for caring gods but

⁴⁰ Cf. Strauss (2001, 197).

also what makes credible such gods as are in the final analysis impossible. To anticipate, we may expect that what remains unexplained, eros' link to *aphrodisia* and to beauty, will play a crucial role in completing the account.

Before turning to the next section of Socrates' speech in which eros' connection to the beautiful and the good becomes the theme, let us first see what we can understand of Agathon's initial mistake, a mistake that Diotima has now indicated both Socrates and the many also make (203c6-7, 204c1-3), according to which eros is mistaken for its object, the beautiful beloved. That the many should make such a mistake could seem to need little explanation, for Diotima indicates that it is characteristic of the ignorant to be unaware of their own insufficiency, and therefore also that of their eros, despite their being neither beautiful nor good (204a4-6). But even this is strange, for should not the lack of the good, as opposed e.g., to the lack of knowledge of the answer to a mathematical question, be felt regardless of one's ignorance (cf. 211d1-2)? Some further explanation of this ignorance is necessary. We have seen that eros, despite its power to open us to our need, may also be such a source of ignorance. For it is characteristic of eros to arise together with the promise that its fulfillment is available, and although this means that eros could not supply us with a sense of complete self-sufficiency, its arousal implies also a greater sense of sufficiency than is truly warranted. In other words, it is in keeping with erotic longing that the vast gulf separating lover and beloved appears smaller to the lover than it really is. Furthermore, because she suggests that eros, which is a response to a need, only arises when the prospect of its fulfillment seems to be

available, Diotima implies that prior to eros' arousal this need is unfelt. But, of course, this need must be somewhat felt, however little that feeling may be acknowledged, as Diotima later confirms (205a5-8, 206c1-3, 209a8-c3).⁴¹ In this case, when eros does arise with its promise of fulfillment, it brings lovers closer (in their imagination) than they have ever been to what they have long needed. It would therefore be no surprise if lovers then attribute to eros something of its fulfillment and consider eros beautiful and good.

Now, in attributing something of eros' fulfillment to eros, one overlooks or sees inadequately the need to which eros is a response. This oversight was the more subtle error of Agathon to which Socrates pointed in his conversation with him (see page 201 above). In that discussion, Agathon's failure to see this need permitted him to hold not only that eros is beautiful and good but also that eros is neither beautiful nor good. It permitted him to do so because it meant that he did not see the true goodness of eros, when he took eros to be the mere desire for beauty. Thus, when Socrates called attention to the lack of beauty characteristic of desire, Agathon had no further defense of eros (201c6-7). It would seem that eros' capacity to conceal from lovers the need to which it is itself a response leaves lovers to waver regarding the goodness of eros, holding it to be simply good when they are under its spell, and when their eros wanes, inclining them towards a view according to which eros simply lacks goodness. We shall see below the

⁴¹ In the latter two references, Diotima notes that we may long be pregnant in soul prior to the onset of eros. That those pregnant in soul are only then able to give birth, once eros emerges, confirms that they postpone their pregnancy until such hopes as eros provides are available (cf. 206c4-d3, 209b3). In this case, the prior refusal to attempt to beget indicates some awareness of the need to which eros is a response.

difficulty that the young Socrates, whose eros, as Diotima eventually tells us, is not yet purified (211d5-8), has in coming to see how a longing for beauty could be good.

Eros for Beauty and the Good

From the outset of the next section of the speech, in which Diotima sets out to explain the goodness of eros, the question of eros' connection to the good is prominent. Diotima, taking for the time being Socrates' view that eros is simply of beauty (204d2-3, cf. 206e2-5), shows Socrates his confusion attending this view. First, she asks Socrates what the one loving beauty loves, and when he answers "that beauty come to be for him," she points out that the answer needs further explanation: what is it that one obtains in obtaining the beautiful things (204d5-9)? Socrates acknowledges that more explanation is needed, but he cannot provide it (204d10-11); he believes we love beautiful things for some additional reason, i.e., that we do not simply love them merely for the sake of having them, but he cannot say why. Diotima then makes the mystery surrounding beauty greater by her next question, for she substitutes the good for the beautiful and shows Socrates that he can answer to his own satisfaction why we love good things: it is by possessing good things that we are happy, and happiness seems to be the complete or final answer to the question of why we love (204e1-205a4). Whereas the connection between good things and happiness is clear to Socrates, he sees no necessity that the happy attain beauty (cf. 202c10-11, but cf. also c7-8). Furthermore, since Socrates regards happiness as the complete answer to the question of why we wish for anything,

his failure to see the connection between happiness and beauty leaves the love of beauty mysterious.

Thus, while Socrates does not regard beauty as necessary for happiness or therefore the love of beauty as a part or form of the pursuit of happiness, he is also inclined to view all love as love of the good. Diotima brings this out next by attaining Socrates' agreement that eros and the wish for happiness is common and that all seek the good for themselves always (205a5-8). While one could hold that all seek the good for themselves always and also that some sometimes also love things that are not goods or are not loved as goods, as Socrates seems to regard beautiful things, Socrates does not take this position. For when Diotima suggests next, hypothetically, that all always love the same things, Socrates does not object (205a9-b1). As we shall have to explain eventually, Socrates' belief in the prevalence of the wish for happiness obscures from him the belief he also has that love of beauty is not a part or kind of the love of good things. Therefore, Socrates is at a loss when Diotima asks him why we only call some human beings lovers (205a9-b3), for this is a question he could at least have begun to answer if he recalled the difference suggested just before between the relations of beautiful and good things to happiness.

Rather than calling Socrates' attention to his conflicting opinions about the eros for beautiful things, Diotima responds to Socrates' perplexity by telling him not to wonder and then offering an explanation of our usage of the term "love" (*eros*), according to which we cut off one part of the whole eros for good things and happiness and give to this portion the name of the whole, while giving other names to the other

parts (205b4-5, d1-8). Diotima likens this usage of eros to that of *poiesis* (poetry or making); according to Diotima, the whole cause for the going from non-being into being of anything is *poiesis*, so that the works by all the arts are makings (*poeseis*), and all the craftsmen of these are makers or poets (*poietai*), although only those concerned with music and meter are called poets (205b7-9).

Diotima's definition of poetry is odd, as her very explanation of it suggests, for she claims first that the whole cause of anything coming into being is poetry, but then she limits poetry to the works of craftsmen. Surely she cannot mean that those beings that are not generated by humans are generated by divine craftsmen, given her earlier disproof of such gods as would have any need to make anything. Diotima could have simply referred to all human production and noted that only some forms of this are called poetry. By doing so, she would have called attention not so much to the generating aspect of human production as its purposive character according to which the beings it brings into existence are understood to exist for some purpose. Instead, Diotima simply refers to the way human production produces beings, but, by so doing, she tacitly points to what may be the source of poetry's distinct status among human productions. For such beings as poetry produces may have a very different status from both those generated by the other arts and those generated by natural processes. The products of poetry may be taken to be not so much beings as imitations of beings; poems are certainly not merely the sounds of music and meter or the colored shapes of letters drawn on paper (cf. *Republic* 597d11-e8). In other words, poetry may be a form of making which, in a sense, does not produce beings. In this case, Diotima's example may be one in which she gives to a whole class

the name of an activity that does not really belong to that class. We have seen and shall see further that there is reason to doubt that all pursuit of the good should be called eros.

Regardless of how we ought to interpret Diotima's example of poetry, we must note that Socrates has more confidence in Diotima's account of the usage of poetry than he does in her analogous explanation of eros, as his responses show (cf. 205c3, 10 with d9). Diotima's claim is that "all desire for good things and being happy is the greatest and deceitful eros for everyone" (205d1-3), but this very formulation suggests that she is conflating unlike things. In keeping with the distinction Socrates had drawn in his conversation with Agathon between wish and desire (200b4-d6), Diotima had just referred to our "wish" for happiness (205a2-7), thereby indicating the element of self-reflection entailed by the longing for happiness as opposed to any mere desire for a good thing, but she now refers to our desire for happiness. It was presumably also this self-reflective character of wish which justified Diotima's earlier suggestion that happiness was an answer to the question of why one wishes which only *seemed* to be complete (205a3), for if the wish for happiness depends on self-reflection, a further explanation of this wish can be made by reference to our rational nature which gives rise to such a wish. Furthermore, it is presumably this element of self-reflection which also justifies Diotima's present description of the eros for happiness as "deceitful", for, as we have seen, such self-awareness as arises along with eros, which awareness informs the hopes for happiness of the erotic, is an incomplete awareness. Diotima therefore ignores the distinction between wish and desire, so that she can say the eros of those we call lovers is

merely one kind of eros, while those who pursue the good in money-making, love of exercise, or philosophy have other kinds of eros (205d3-8).

Now Socrates has some reservations about this view of eros, although he is still inclined to hold it, and therefore, when Diotima proceeds next to strengthen even further her claim that all eros is of the good, she attains Socrates' emphatic approval (206a2).

Dropping his mask, Socrates the speaker now has his Diotima argue against Aristophanes' apparent teaching, that lovers love their own other half, by arguing that we do not love our own things, as our own, since we are willing to give these up, as we are willing to undergo even amputations, if our own things seem harmful (205d10-e5). Now this example shows, at most, that we prefer what is good for ourselves to what is merely our own, not, as Diotima concludes, that each does not cherish his own things (205e5-6). Indeed, one may wonder if the sense of loss accompanying the surrender of what is one's own for the sake of something better can be fully explained without reference to an independent delight we take in our own things. Now, by denying that humans have eros for something other than the good, as she now makes perfectly explicit (205e7-206a1), Diotima presents eros as thoroughly rational. That is, eros is aimed only at what is good for human beings, and despite the young Socrates' failure to see the connection between eros for beauty and happiness or the human good, such a rationalized depiction of eros proves too much for him to resist.

This rationalization of eros has, to be sure, some powerful attractions. In the first place, it presents human beings as having a relatively simple nature; we have one basic desire which explains all pursuits. Of course, one still needs to explain why, given that

humans all want only the good, humans pursue the good in such diverse ways as money-making, eros in its ordinary sense, and philosophy, but, at first sight, Diotima's account is attractive for the intelligibility it attributes to human actions. For a young man interested in philosophy, as Socrates evidently was (204a8-9), this may be a powerful attraction. Secondly, by claiming that humans desire the good and only the good, that is, by affirming the simplicity of human nature, Diotima's account minimizes the problem of satisfaction, for Diotima denies the possibility that one desire both what is good and something else, perhaps one's own things, which could be incompatible with the good. For, if such a conflict among desires were possible, one would still be unsatisfied or incompletely satisfied even while choosing what is good. Diotima has already referred to the general tendency to deny one's own insufficiency (204a4-6), and her account's minimization of the problem of satisfaction accords with this tendency.⁴² Now, there is one specific problem for human happiness that Socrates is facing, for he has an eros whose object is somehow beauty, a beauty whose connection to happiness remains obscure to him, and, as we eventually find out, it is a beauty which may require him to forgo many apparently good things (211d3-8). There is therefore some reason to fear that our eros for beauty even opposes our own good, and Socrates' attraction to Diotima's account of eros may be above all due to her account's denial that eros for beauty poses such a problem.

Whatever the reason, Diotima brings out that Socrates is very taken by her view of eros. She then adds two qualifications to the claim that eros is of the good, namely,

⁴² It would seem, however, that the tendency to deny one's own insufficiency reflects a care for one's own in addition to the concern for the good.

that humans love the good for themselves and that they want to possess the good for all time (206a6-9). These two qualifications show why forethought and therefore reflection on one's condition is an essential element of the wish for happiness. Having obtained Socrates' agreement to the qualifications (206a8, 10, 13), Diotima asks Socrates, since eros is always of this, by what way of seeking and by what deed do those we call lovers distinguish themselves (206b1-4)? Earlier, Diotima had asked Socrates why only some are called lovers (205a9-b2), and, in acknowledging that he shared this question (205b3), Socrates tacitly acknowledged the well-known fact that there is a distinct class of human beings called lovers. Socrates would have known of such a class because he distinguished them by their characteristic activities, but now, after Diotima has claimed that all eros is of the good for oneself for all time, he is unable even to begin to name these activities (206b5-6). Presumably Socrates could have referred to the typical erotic deeds, and therefore his incapacity to answer suggests that he (still) does not see the connection between eros as ordinarily understood, i.e., eros that is somehow of beautiful things, and eros as he takes it to be for all human beings, as the longing for the sempiternal possession of the good.

Diotima therefore will explain eros to Socrates (206b7), and her explanation will proceed on the assumption that eros simply is the longing for the sempiternal possession of the good (206e7-207a4, 207c7-d2, 208b5-6, c2-4). Now, as we have already had occasion to suggest, there is reason to doubt that eros can simply be explained in this manner, and this suggestion will be confirmed by close scrutiny of Diotima's forthcoming account. Furthermore, Diotima has given some evidence and will continue

to give evidence that she knows her procedure is misleading. Why, then, does she proceed in this fashion? Or, to ask what amounts to the same question, why has she been at pains, since the speech turned to question of eros' use, to secure this basis, i.e., the premise that all eros is for sempiternal possession of the good, for her subsequent explanation of eros?

In the first place, we have seen that by proceeding as she does, Diotima may present eros as more rational than it is and that Socrates is quite drawn to this rationalization of eros. Diotima's procedure therefore makes it seem possible for one such as Socrates, who manifests a strong concern for his own good, to hold his own eros in higher regard than he might otherwise have held it. And Diotima may have wished to help him hold eros in higher regard both because she does not yet know if he is suited to know the whole truth about eros (209e5-210a2), and because she evidently thinks the erotic experience may be of considerable service to an education (cf. 211b7-d1); by presenting eros as she does, Diotima may make it easier for Socrates to permit himself an erotic experience. At the same time, Diotima's procedure has an advantage for conveying the truth about eros. Diotima has drawn out from Socrates that he does believe all eros is for the good, and, by attempting to think through this opinion and explain what we call eros on its basis, Diotima can show Socrates, if he can perceive the inadequacy of her account, the inadequacy of his own opinion, as he might not have done if Diotima merely offered a different account of eros. Now, Socrates also holds eros to be of beautiful things, the attainment of which has an obscure relation to happiness or one's good. If Diotima offered Socrates an account of eros for beauty and simply omitted

raising the question of one's good, then Socrates would not have had to confront the question of this eros' relation to happiness. Thus, Diotima proceeds so that such dissatisfaction as Socrates may feel with her account cannot but raise the question of eros' goodness; Diotima's procedure compels Socrates to hold eros up to the standard of the good. We may add that it was Socrates' own question about the use of eros for human beings that initiated this discussion and first showed the necessity that eros be held up to this standard.

Eros as Begetting in the Beautiful

Thus, Diotima now tells Socrates what eros' object is: eros is of "begetting in the beautiful" (206b7-8, cf. e5). Socrates' dissatisfaction with this answer is not hard to discern. He immediately responds that this answer is in need of divination and that he does not understand (206b9-10); and Diotima's subsequent attempt to explain this "more clearly" will not prove to satisfy him (206c1-e6). Indeed, from this point until the speech's conclusion, Socrates' responses all indicate, to one degree or another, his dissatisfaction with Diotima's account of eros (206b9-10, e6, 207c1, c5-7, 208b7-9).⁴³ Yet at the speech's conclusion, Socrates says that he is persuaded by Diotima's teaching (212b1-2). Socrates therefore suggests that the speech's concluding sections, to which he never responds and therefore never voices discontent, supplement or modify the teaching of the preceding sections in a way that he regards as essential to the understanding of

⁴³ I take Socrates remarks in the optative, "it may be", to convey incomplete acceptance of what Diotima has said.

eros.⁴⁴ Thus, Socrates' indications of his youthful incomprehension of Diotima's teaching prove to serve a most important role: they highlight the inadequacy or incompleteness of what Diotima presents as complete accounts of eros.⁴⁵

What is dissatisfying in Diotima's first answer? Diotima calls attention to her modification of Socrates' view, saying that eros is not simply of beauty but of begetting in the beautiful (206e2-5). According to Diotima, all human beings are pregnant, in body and soul; when we reach a certain age (puberty), our nature desires to beget; and it is possible to beget only in the beautiful (206c1-5). Now Diotima says that begetting is the being-together of men and women (206c5-6), and while it makes sense that we desire this being-together upon reaching puberty, it is unclear how this being-together relates to pregnancy in body and soul or even what such pregnancy, especially that of the soul, a pregnancy which Diotima will later confirm predates puberty (209c3), might mean.⁴⁶ Diotima does offer an explanation of how lovers come to mistake their true aim, begetting, for the beautiful beloved in which they beget: because lovers can only beget in the beautiful, the beautiful beloved provides lovers release from their labor pains, and this arouses the seriousness of lovers about beauty (206d7-e1). But at this point, it is entirely unclear why beauty is a necessary means to begetting. Diotima tells us that both conception and generation are the immortal thing in a mortal animal and the divine thing,

⁴⁴ Cf. Strauss (2001, 223).

⁴⁵ Seen in this light, Diotima's suggestions that Socrates ought not wonder may be seen as tests to see if Socrates can be satisfied with an incomplete account (205b4, 207c8-9, 208b4-5, cf. 208b7); Socrates' continued questioning shows that he has passed these tests.

⁴⁶ At 206e5 and again at 209c3, Diotima refers to both begetting and generating as the objects of eros, and she therefore appears to distinguish between the begetting that is the being-together of men and women and the generation which can occur with the being-together. Still, her teaching seems rather to conflate these and to present eros as aiming at the objects which are generated by or through eros.

that generation can only occur with what accords with it, and that beauty accords with the divine while ugliness does not accord (206c6-d2), but it remains unclear why beauty accords or what accordance with the divine might mean. Diotima only adds, cryptically, that “Beauty is Fate and Eileithuia for generation” (206d2-3).⁴⁷ We shall have to wait to interpret this line.

Now, even if we grant Diotima’s mysterious claim that eros is of begetting in the beautiful, it is unclear how this claim shows that eros is the pursuit of one’s own good for all time, as Diotima asserts that it does (206d7-207a4). That is, she repeats that generation is immortal for a mortal and then adds “it is necessary to desire immortality with the good *from the things being agreed, if eros is of the good being for oneself always. It is necessary from this speech that eros also be of immortality*” (206e8-207a4). Evidently, the demand that eros be of sempiternal possession of the good forces Diotima to look to eros’ productive capacity in order to explain eros, but, even if the products of eros are somehow immortal, a question remains, as Diotima’s very formulation shows: does the immortality which is available through generation also provide for one’s own good? Diotima only affirms that generation is immortal. Still, despite the many questions that Diotima’s first explanation of eros leaves unanswered, we should not overlook how it begins to confirm our interpretation of the treatment of eros’ intermediate character. There, eros was presented as a response to a need, a response that arises with the onset of sexual desire and that has a mysterious connection to beauty. Diotima’s present account suggests that eros somehow fulfills the wish for immortal

⁴⁷ Eileithuia and the Fates were goddesses who presided over child-birth (Dover 1980, 148).

possession of the good while indicating again that eros arises with the onset of sexual desire and maintains a mysterious connection to beauty.

Before continuing his account of Diotima's explanation of eros as begetting in the beautiful, Socrates indicates a break in his presentation. He says, "all these things she used to teach me, whenever she would make speeches concerning erotic matters, and one time she asked me..." (207a5-6). The prior conversation with Diotima thus proves to be a collection of conversations with her, namely all those exchanges concerning erotic matters. We are thus compelled to ask whether the remaining sections also concern erotic matters. Obviously they do (cf. 209e5), but, as we shall see, there is reason to wonder if the remainder is strictly limited to a discussion of eros; that is, the first section of the last part of the speech, which deals with eros and the desire to beget among the beasts (207a7-c1), may well be considered sub-erotic, and the speech's concluding section, the ladder of love, appears to transcend eros at a certain stage (210c6ff).⁴⁸ Evidently, Diotima believes that in order for Socrates, who has not yet understood the earlier teaching about eros (207c7), to fully understand eros, she must make a new beginning (cf. 207c2-4).

We should not, however, overlook the continuity between this section and the previous one. In her preceding account of eros as begetting in the beautiful, Diotima had referred to pregnancy of body and soul, but her limitation of eros there to heterosexual eros (206c5-6) and her failure to explain what might be meant by pregnancy of soul

⁴⁸Cf. Strauss (2001, 241).

inclines one to think primarily of eros as child-begetting.⁴⁹ Then, in this section of the speech, Diotima begins by raising the question of the cause of the eros and desire to generate children among the beasts (207a6-b2), and she suggests that this eros is to be explained by “what we have agreed upon many times,” which, as she puts it here, is that “the mortal nature seeks as far as possible to be always and immortal” (207c9-d2). Diotima thus gives the impression that she is merely further explaining her previous account.

Her present account has, however, some significant differences from the previous one. Eros was said to be of begetting in the beautiful, and while Diotima here refers again to the desire to generate, there is no mention of beauty in the entire passage. This omission of beauty accords with the turn to the “eros” of the beasts, whose pursuit of the most apparently suitable mate we do not regard as a pursuit of beauty. Furthermore, in the present account, it is not exactly generation which Diotima suggests animals seek; they seek rather those activities which serve generation: mixing with one another and nurturing the young (207b1-2).⁵⁰ Diotima thus draws our attention to the natural inclinations that serve what we may call “the mortal nature’s” purpose: procreation. Nature gives animals these inclinations in order to perpetuate the species. Diotima accordingly explains these inclinations neither as an animal’s concern for its own happiness nor even as an animal’s concern for immortality, but as the mortal nature’s seeking as far as possible to be immortal, which it does by “always leaving behind another young one in place of the old” (207d1-3). Along with omitting beauty in this

⁴⁹ Cf. Strauss (2001, 206-207).

⁵⁰ See Strauss (2001, 218).

passage, Diotima makes no mention of gods or divinity except as a contrast with the quite limited immortality available to the mortal nature (208a7-b1, b4). Furthermore, she calls attention to the great hazard these natural inclinations bring for the animals that possess them; animals are led “to fight, the weaker against the stronger, and to die for [their progeny], being racked by hunger so as to rear them, and doing everything else” (207b3-6). Animals are led to give up their lives and, if not their happiness, their well-being for the sake of the natural impulse to procreate. It would appear to be this aspect of the natural urge to procreate, i.e., the way it compels animals to give up much for another’s good, that justifies Diotima’s reference to the beasts’ erotic disposition as a sickness (207a9).⁵¹

Diotima thus draws Socrates’ attention to the natural desire to procreate, the urge for which humans become conscious of at puberty, and to the dangerousness of this urge, in accordance with which, so far from providing one the good for all time, it leads one to give up one’s good for another younger being like oneself. Thus, Diotima also softens this teaching by assimilating death to life, portraying all of the latter as a natural process of leaving behind another like oneself. That is, Diotima next claims that no attribute of any animal ever lasts—they are all always changing, with new attributes replacing the old (207d4-8, 208a7-b1); seen this way, the death an animal undergoes for its young is no greater change than that undergone by each animal at every moment.⁵² We are always dying as much as we will when we literally die. But Diotima spells out everything which would have to be changing this way for this position to be true, and the change to which

⁵¹ Cf. Strauss (2001,218).

⁵² See Strauss (2001, 220).

she draws the greatest attention points us to the account's shortcoming. Diotima says that "much stranger" than the constant change in our body or our soul's dispositions is that the sciences suffer the same (207e5-208a3), and she offers evidence in this case saying, "for what is called study is because there is a departure of knowledge; for forgetting is the departure of science, and study, introducing anew a fresh memory in place of the departed, preserves the science, so that it seems to be the same" (208a3-7). But, for what is remembered to seem to be the same as what was forgotten, there must be something which remembers and compares what is remembered to what was known before. Therefore, remembering entails a continuity of awareness tying one's memories together, but, as Socrates' denial of the immortality of the soul implies, with death will come the end of this continuity; after death there will be nothing which can remember what has already been experienced. Actual death, through the obliteration of the continuity of thought which holds our diverse experiences together throughout life, far surpasses the changes we undergo at every other moment.

Of course, Diotima's presentation primarily points away from such dark thoughts, for her account encourages us to overlook the loss of our selves that is our death, and she therefore makes it easier to accept her suggestion that eros simply is the urge to procreate. Socrates, however, perhaps wondering what has happened to beauty and the divine in her account, to say nothing of the wish to possess the good for oneself for all time, is incredulous. He makes his last remark within the speech here, and this remark indicates as much or more doubt in Diotima's teaching than he expresses at any other point, asking if things are truly as she described them (208b7-9). As we have noted, at the speech's

conclusion, Socrates says that he has been persuaded, and therefore our attention is drawn to what the remainder of the speech offers that the previous section lacked.

Diotima, however, emphasizes the continuity between the forthcoming section and the previous ones. That is, Diotima responds to Socrates' doubts by affirming her previous argument's truth and then turning to explain ambition or love of honor (*philotimia*) along the same lines. According to Diotima, the ambitious are "ready to run all risks still more than over children, to expend money, to toil in any kind of toils, and to die for" another, all in order to obtain "immortal fame for all time" (208c5-d2). Diotima then cites cases of famous lovers and parents who have died for their beloveds and children, claiming their love needed the added compensation of fame in order to motivate their sacrifices (208d2-7). She then adds that "all do everything they do for the sake of immortal virtue and such a glorious reputation, and, as much as they are better, so much more do they do it" (208d7-e1). This formulation allows virtue as well as fame to motivate sacrifice, and the statement's final clause concedes that humans have more motives than concern with immortal virtue and fame, just as the previous statement seemed to require only that fame was a necessary addition to the concern lovers felt for beloveds and children not that it was their sole motive. Still, Diotima says next, in explanation of the love of fame, "for they love (*erosin*) the immortal" (208e1), and this statement, by its suggestion that the object of eros is fame, because fame is immortal, and by its omission of any reference to one's possessing this immortality for oneself—to say nothing of happiness—cannot but raise a question when contrasted with Diotima's next sentence. There, Diotima tells us that those who are pregnant in body and who therefore

turn to the generation of children “suppose” that they thereby procure “immortality, memory, and happiness *for themselves* for all the future” (208e1-5). For anyone aware of his wish for happiness, the discrepancy between the immortal fame the ambitious may receive, which is of course of no good to them once they are dead, and the immortal happiness those pregnant in body hope to receive is glaring. Even noting that Diotima, by qualifying what those pregnant in body receive as what “they suppose”, implies that such immortal happiness will not be attained, we must still explain how begetting children can inspire such confidence. More broadly stated, Diotima’s formulation forces us to confront the discrepancy between the immortality that the two products of eros, children and fame, may supply, and the immortal happiness which Diotima had claimed at the outset was eros’ object (205d1-3, 206a11-12, 206e7-207a2).

Perhaps, however, we can best explain this difficulty after first explaining another. While it makes sense that Diotima turns to child-begetting in her explanation of eros, i.e., in her explanation of the deeds for which we call some lovers (cf. 206b1-8), it is far less clear why the pursuit of fame is brought up in this context. Surely some have pursued fame without the motivation of a specific beloved.⁵³ Why, then, does Diotima present the generation of fame as a consequence of eros? In her description, those pregnant in soul, i.e., the ones who will generate fame, give birth only after first reaching puberty and finding someone beautiful, in both body and soul, in which to beget (209b1-c3). The need for beauty in the beloved’s body confirms that sexual attraction as well as concern for the soul are required for generating the virtue for which one may hope to

⁵³ Cf. Bloom (1993, 515).

become famous. Furthermore, Diotima's description of the begetting of virtue, whose aim she suggested was fame, suggests that the virtue is in fact for the beautiful beloved. That is, Diotima suggests that those pregnant in soul beget virtue in an effort to educate their beloveds (209b7-c2). Diotima's suggestion of the connection between the generation of fame or virtue and love of a beautiful human being thus compels us above all to consider again the meaning of Diotima's claim, a claim she repeats here (209b3-4), that beauty is a necessary means for begetting. Is beauty merely a means to begetting and why is it a necessary means?

We have seen since Diotima's first mention of the need for beauty, that begetting requires much of lovers. Both forms of begetting, childbirth and ambition, require the willingness of lovers to give up everything, their lives and their own good, for the sake of their children or fame. While animals seem to have no need for beauty, humans do; that is, beauty makes begetting possible for such animals as can reflect on their condition and thereby wish to possess the good for all time. We can now begin to interpret Diotima's suggestion that "Beauty" acts as a goddess presiding over generation (206d2-3): beauty acts as a goddess by providing, in a manner we shall have to explain further, such encouragement as permits lovers to risk their lives while begetting;⁵⁴ that is, beauty somehow provides lovers such encouragement as a goddess would. Therefore, in presenting the objects of eros as children and fame, Diotima presents two desires as included in the erotic experience which do not simply seem to be for our good. The desires for children and fame would seem rather to reflect our love of our own things, our

⁵⁴ Cf. Strauss (2001, 206, 208).

offspring; Diotima says at the conclusion of her treatment of child-begetting, just before her turn to fame-begetting, “do not wonder if everything by nature honors its own offshoot” (208b4-5). There seems to be a natural concern or affection for what seems akin to oneself, and by pointing this out, Diotima tacitly acknowledges that all desire is not for one’s own good (cf. 205d1-3, e5-206a1). Yet Diotima also shows that humans do not act on these desires while regarding them as bad for themselves (cf. 205e1-5), for she argues that we seek to beget only when we can do so in the beautiful, that is, when we can also hope to procure our own good. Bearing in mind the discrepancy between the desires to beget and the desire for one’s own good, a new question arises: are the desires to beget merely an unfortunate fact of our situation in the face of which we seek refuge in the beautiful, or do these desires contribute not only to our need for beauty but also to the hopes we experience in the presence of beauty?

By indicating that we only seek a beautiful beloved after puberty, Diotima suggests that sexual desire is a necessary prerequisite for our erotic concern with beauty. Sexual desire entices us with a powerful pleasure that requires us to put aside, at least for a time, considerations of our own good. With the onset of sexual desire, then, one may be led to question the connection between happiness and rational considerations of one’s own good; one may begin to hope for a happiness beyond that available to those narrowly concerned with their self-interest, and one is thereby prepared for devotion to something beautiful. Furthermore, Diotima describes the pleasure which one anticipates in the satisfaction of sexual desire as one of intense delight and dissolution (206d4), and the anticipation of such a pleasure may support the hopes beauty permits, for, in the thought

of delighted dissolution one would experience a taste of the happiness without concern for mortality that beauty seems to promise.⁵⁵

Diotima's indications about the necessity that lovers possess a concern with virtue are less clear. She seems to allow that some may be pregnant only in body, but there is reason to believe that those pregnant in body, whose hope for happiness has become a puzzle to us (208e1-5), share some of the concern for virtue characteristic of those pregnant in soul. Diotima's description of the beloved as a "human being" confirms that heterosexual eros may also accompany pregnancy in soul (209b7, cf. 208d2-3), and although Diotima has presented those pregnant in body as if they are simply in a different class from those pregnant in soul (208e1-3),⁵⁶ it is hard to imagine any human couple that is so devoid of soul-pregnancy as not to engage in any of the virtue-begetting that Diotima describes. For, as we have indicated, those pregnant in soul are concerned with virtue because of their concern to educate their beloveds (209b7-c4), and it is hard to imagine any lover who lacked all concern for the beloved's education. Perhaps there are some people that we call lovers who lack all concern for virtue, but, in agreement with Socrates' teaching in the *Phaedrus*, it seems to me that such lovers will pay a price in terms of what beauty may offer them (cf. *Phdr.* 250e1ff.).

The price will consist not only, as it could seem that Diotima suggests, in the inferiority of such children as merely bodily pregnancy can produce, children, that is,

⁵⁵ Cf. *Philebus* 47a3-b7. We should therefore consider also this aspect of sexual delight in our interpretation of the *Phaedrus*' indications of the role sexual desire itself has in the formation of religious hopes (see pages 176-177 above).

⁵⁶ At 209a1-2, Diotima refers to those pregnant in soul *more* than in body, and we may wonder if the other group simply consists of those more pregnant in body than in soul, i.e., those pregnant in body are to some extent also pregnant in soul.

which are less immortal, less beautiful, and, as independent human beings, less one's own than the fame-inspiring productions of those concerned with virtue (209c5-7).⁵⁷ For Diotima also indicates that the products of those preeminent generators of virtue, the great statesmen, have inspired the production of many temples for those great statesmen (209e3-4), and, while these statesmen were most likely themselves aware that they were not gods, Diotima indicates that the beautiful laws these men leave us are such as to inspire the belief that they are of divine origin. Such laws require our dedication, and by noting our inclination to treat beautiful things which demand our dedication as being of divine origin, Diotima hints at how beauty may inspire the hope that it does in the face of mortality. In a way that is described in Socrates' palinode (see pages 159-167 above),⁵⁸ devotion to beauty arouses our hopes for the gods, for gods through whose care the sacrifices eros demands of lovers may turn out to be, as lovers believe, not harmful.⁵⁹ In dedication to a beautiful beloved, one experiences delight while disregarding one's own

⁵⁷ See Strauss (2001, 228).

⁵⁸ That this is Diotima's view also is confirmed by her indication in the ladder of love that prior to attaining the highest stage of that ladder one will imagine the beautiful to be a god (211a5-8, cf. 204c1-5).

⁵⁹ See also 212a5-7. Cf. Lutz (102-103). While my interpretation of the *Symposium* is much indebted to Lutz's, I disagree with his argument here. He writes, "eros for immortality makes us love *to kalon*, not because it allows us to forsake good things, but because, without being fully aware of it, we think that *to kalon* permits us to acquire good things (immortality and happiness) that we cannot obtain on our own." Lutz finds "the root of eros" in "a hidden sense of justice, a conviction that great sacrifices made for the sake of virtue or to save others deserve and must receive some reward" (ibid.), but by this account it is unclear how the conviction or hope that sacrifices will be rewarded originates. Furthermore, it seems to me psychologically impossible to love beauty *in order* to feel worthy of being rewarded for sacrificing for beauty: if we were conscious of a concern to be rewarded, we would cease to feel worthy of the reward, as Lutz concedes by referring to our sense that "sacrifices" deserve reward; if we were unconscious of the concern to be rewarded, and we love beauty for the good things we may get from it, i.e., the reward it offers, as Lutz suggests, we would be unconscious of any concern for beauty. I argue rather that eros, strictly speaking, is not of immortality, and, more importantly, that we do not love beautiful human beings *because* we believe such love permits our attainment of good things, but rather, that because we love beautiful human beings and this love requires us to forsake good things, we are able to hope to obtain good things we could not otherwise obtain. Still, Lutz's interpretation, by suggesting a connection between self-sacrifice for beauty and the hope for transcendent goods, points in the same direction as my interpretation, and it was only after reading his work that the *Symposium* first seemed intelligible to me.

good, and this state of delightful self-forgetting encourages one to hope that this dedication is also good for oneself. The hope eros thus arouses implies belief in the existence of caring gods that may provide one with immortality. Now, lovers who turn to their beloveds with a concern for virtue as opposed to mere sexual desire see their beloveds' well-being not as a mere means to begetting or pleasure, but as the end for which virtue is required. That is, the concern for virtue permits lovers to be dedicated to their beautiful beloveds rather than to use them as a means for begetting. The concern for virtue permits this most obviously because it makes the beloved the object of the lover's service, in his attempt to educate the beloved, but also, as we may add based on the indications of the *Phaedrus* (*Phdr.* 250e1ff.), because a concern for virtue permits lovers to understand themselves as the kind of being that can and ought be dedicated to another. Only for a lover concerned with virtue can the beloved's beauty offer such complete hopes as justify Diotima's depiction of Beauty as a goddess (206d2-3).

Diotima's answer to the question of the deed characteristic of those we call lovers (cf. 206b1-8) thus proves to be a complex analysis of eros which shows the basic elements of the erotic experience: the desire to beget in body and soul, concerns for virtue and beauty, and the wish for happiness. She does not put these elements together for us, as Socrates' presents them in his depiction of the erotic experience in the *Phaedrus*, but we should note that her analysis agrees with that depiction, especially in regard to the important role played by beauty. The desire to beget, both in body and in soul, by requiring the neglect of our own good, increases our need for beauty, while sexual desire,

in anticipating the pleasure of its satisfaction provides an idea of the happiness for which beauty permits us to hope, and the concern with virtue permits and requires the lover's dedication to the beloved, which is the source of the lover's greatest hopes. On its surface, Diotima's manner of presentation leaves the role of beauty mysterious, but, by turning to the two products of eros, children and fame, and suggesting their insufficiency to provide the happiness we also seek, while calling attention to the sacrifices these two desires may demand of us, and noting that beauty permits us to make these sacrifices, her procedure serves to highlight the hopes that dedication to a beautiful beloved arouses. Therefore, the suggestion drawn from the discussion of eros' intermediate character can now be explained, for Diotima has indicated how the onset of sexual desire provides an occasion for the arousal of a response to our need, i.e., our need for immortality: namely through presenting lovers with the prospect of dedication to a beautiful beloved which arouses our hopes for immortality. With the onset of sexual desire and the thoughts of how it might be fulfilled with a beautiful beloved would come such hopes as permit eros to arise, and when one then falls deeply in love those hopes may attain their fullest manifestation (cf. *Phdr.* 251a7-b1, 253e5-6, with 252a1-b1). Thus we can see also how eros is a combination of both wish born of reflection on our mortal condition and a desire for a beautiful human being (see pages 200-201 above).

We can now explain the difficulty Socrates had in seeing the connection between beauty and happiness, for lovers such as Socrates describes himself as having been (211d3-8) do not turn to beauty out of a consideration of their own good. The case is more nearly the opposite: lovers turn to beauty in dedication to it, with willingness to

sacrifice on its behalf. Diotima does suggest that it is out of the dedication that beauty inspires that lovers may finally feel hopeful that they will ultimately obtain their own happiness, but this means that in order for lovers to become so hopeful, they must first forget considerations of their own good.

This is not to say that the lover forgets about his good altogether. Diotima suggested that Need generates Eros, and we interpret this to mean that we have a need for immortal happiness that precedes eros. This is a need of which we can become somewhat aware, as in our awareness of our hopes once eros arises, and Diotima further draws out of Socrates that he has these hopes. The concern for one's own good is never entirely given up: lovers do not love their beautiful beloveds for the sake of their own good, but they also insist that their eros is good for themselves. But then, if beauty is able to inspire such hopes as it does through the dedication it inspires, that is, through the delight lovers feel in their willingness to sacrifice all for their beloved, calling attention to the hope that accompanies this dedication and thus showing the limits to the dedication would undermine the hopes that stem from the dedication. Therefore, in drawing Socrates' attention to the connection between his wish for happiness and his concern for beauty, as her speech seems likely to do once Socrates reflects upon it, Diotima undermines the basis for the hopes that Socrates, the lover (211d3-8), placed in beauty. While Socrates in the *Phaedrus* offers a fuller presentation of the experience of eros, Diotima's analysis of eros subjects eros to greater scrutiny.

In this way, we may now understand what we also observed: Socrates' belief in the prevalence of the wish for happiness obscures his sense that the love of beauty is not

merely one form of the love of the good (cf. 204d5-205b3). The claim that all always wish for the good things does not rule out that some also love beautiful things for their beauty and not for their goodness, but it does rule out one's loving beautiful things without also taking one's own good into consideration. The claim therefore rules out a lover's complete self-forgetting in devotion to a beautiful beloved, and this is what the young erotic Socrates would have taken love of beauty to imply (cf. 211d3-8). Diotima's procedure therefore draws attention to the hope for one's own good that attends the love of beauty, and, by doing so, she indicates that it is only the incomplete awareness of the character of one's love for beauty that permits eros to arouse these hopes. It would seem to follow, and I believe the ladder of love will confirm that it does, that if a lover came to see the character of his love for beauty fully, he would be freed thereby from the mistaken hope that beauty may provide the good it seems to promise.

The Ladder of Love

We cannot tell what conclusions the young Socrates drew in response to Diotima's teaching up to this point, for he makes no response after Diotima finishes her discussion of eros for fame before she turns to the speech's final section, the revelation of the highest mysteries regarding eros (210a1ff.), or what we have called the ladder of love (cf. 211c3). It would not be surprising, however, if a young lover such as Socrates presents himself as having been did not put the teaching of the preceding sections together, as we, with the luxury of re-reading each line, and with our attention trained by the prior study of the *Phaedrus*, have attempted to do. Thus, Diotima must continue her

speech and draw more explicit attention to what we have made the heart of our interpretation of the previous section, i.e., the role a concern with beauty plays in eros. According to her explicit teaching in the previous section, beauty was a mere means for begetting, but in the present section, concern for beauty is what motivates the lover's ascent.⁶⁰ Indeed, in a way which I believe confirms our previous interpretation, Diotima presents a lover becoming ever more aware of his concern for beauty and through this increased awareness he is finally freed of eros.

Diotima now describes an ascent at the outset of which one is led or leads oneself to beautiful bodies,⁶¹ with one of which one falls in love (210a7), and at the conclusion of which the successful initiate sees the beautiful itself or knows what beauty is (211c8-d3). This ascent is described as a ladder on which one ascends from one kind of beauty to the next as a series of steps, using and leaving behind the previous for the sake of the next, higher beauty (211c3). In Diotima's description of the ascent,⁶² there are three main

⁶⁰ Cf. Strauss (2001, 213).

⁶¹ Diotima begins by suggesting that one is led (by another person) in this erotic ascent (210a6-7), but she later makes explicit that one may also lead oneself (211b7-c1). Why then does she first present the ascent as if it requires a leader? Later in the account, when describing the turn from the beauty of practices to that of the sciences, Diotima switches to the active "to lead" (*agagein*) (210c6-7), evidently indicating that anyone who reaches this point no longer needs a leader. Diotima may begin by suggesting that a leader is needed in order to highlight the independence that one gains when one has completed the study of the beauty of laws and practices. As we shall see, there is further reason to believe that the attainment of this stage is accompanied by a gain in independence.

⁶² Diotima's later listing of the stages differs from what she describes. Between the beauty of one body and that of all bodies she inserts the beauty of two bodies; she omits mention of the beauty of souls and laws (211c3-d1). As Strauss notes, these changes emphasize the importance of the body (2001, 237-238), which will prove to be essential to eros. But the addition of two bodies also seems to make Diotima's description of the ascent appear to have greater continuity between its steps than it does, in which case we may wonder if Diotima has not altered her account so as to make the ascent appear more gradual than it is. If this has been Diotima's purpose, we can also understand her omission of souls and laws along similar lines, for omitting the suggestion that the beauty of souls and laws are the rungs of a ladder which one leaves behind as one ascends permits one to see a greater similarity between those at the higher levels of the ladder and those below than her earlier account suggests there is.

stages prior to the sight of the beautiful itself.⁶³ First, one loves one body, and then, having given birth to beautiful speeches, one comes to see the relation between one's beloved's beauty and the beauty of other bodies, and one sets oneself down as a lover of all beautiful bodies (210a5-b5). This is the first stage. Next, believing the beauty of soul more worthy of honor than that of body, one loves someone with a fitting soul. This beloved must have at least a little bodily beauty, but he is loved for his soul, and this love compels the lover to view the beauty of laws and practices out of a desire to educate the beloved (210b6-c4). This is the second stage. After seeing the beauty of laws and practices,⁶⁴ one turns to the beauty of the sciences (210c6-7). At this stage, the last stage before the sight of the beautiful itself, there is no longer any mention of eros; one looks upon the beauty of the sciences but one evidently does not love it. Finally, Diotima indicates no change in one's understanding of beauty, such as she indicates within the two previous stages (210a7-b6, c5-6), from the beginning of this stage to the final sight of the beautiful itself; she suggests that only a period of strengthening, viewing the beauty of the sciences, is needed before one finally catches sight of the beauty of this highest science (210d6-e1). There is no mention of eros for the beautiful itself.

As indicated in the introduction to this chapter, Diotima's use of eros in the ladder of love limits eros to love of another human being, and is therefore consistent with our suggestion that her claims in the preceding sections that eros was of begetting in the beautiful (206b7-8, e5), or the immortal (207a3-4, 208b5-6, 208e1), or the good for

⁶³ There are developments within each stage, but I take the main stages to be marked by the use of the phrase, "after these things" or "after [the things of the previous stage]" (210b6, c6).

⁶⁴ Diotima omits mention of laws when she suggests one turns from practices to the sciences. This omission is in keeping with the suggestion of note 64 that Diotima does not wish to draw too much attention to the critique of law implied by her account.

oneself for all time (205a5-b2, d1-3, e7-206a1, a11-12, 207a2-3), were misleading statements meant ultimately to show the discrepancy between the products produced by eros and the hope accompanying it. Now, the object of eros is affirmed to be the beautiful beloved to whom lovers can be dedicated, and, in accordance with our previous account, full knowledge of the character of beauty is accompanied by a lack of eros. As indicated in the introduction, full knowledge of the character of beauty, such as is acquired by one who attains the final rung of the ladder, entails no longer imagining the beautiful itself, that is the divine source of beauty, as the kind of god who could help lovers attain the happiness for which they hope (211a5-b1, 211b2-3, e1-4). But if we interpret the final stage of the ladder of love as confirming our suggestion that freedom from eros comes from knowledge of beauty, we must ask why Diotima drops eros from her account before this stage, when one turns from the beauty of laws and practices to that of the sciences. As we have noted, Diotima presents the transition from viewing the beauty of the sciences to that of the science of the beautiful itself without indicating a change in one's thoughts about beauty, but she still suggests some development. It is plausible that one could see the character of beauty sufficiently to undermine one's eros without yet having complete clarity about what beauty is, but then it is unclear why one would first be studying other sciences and only later complete one's investigation of beauty. Diotima does not give any indication that the subject matter of the sciences viewed in the penultimate stage is a prerequisite for knowledge of beauty, and, as it seems to me, a lover or former lover who has begun to learn enough about beauty to

trouble his eros is not likely to turn seriously to any other study in place of that of the beautiful. Let us then examine the ascent more closely to see if we can explain it.

At the first stage, one loves one beautiful body and then generates beautiful speeches (210a7-8). Presumably, the speeches generated are love speeches concerning the beauty of the beloved (cf. *Lysis* 204c-d, 205b-d). In speaking about the beloved's beauty, the lover distinguishes beauty from the body to which it belongs, and thus the lover is able to note that the beauty of any body is related to that of any other, and that "if it is necessary to pursue beauty in shape (*eidei*), it is much mindlessness not to believe the beauty on all bodies is one and the same, and considering this, he sets himself down as a lover of all the beautiful bodies" (210a8-b5). The recognition of the first beloved's beauty as beauty permits the lover to see the beloved's beauty as a member of the same class as the beauty of all other bodies. This awareness breaks the hold that the beloved's beauty has on the lover, and the lover now believes the extreme love of one body is something "small" (210b5-6). It is small because it requires the neglect of the beauty of the other bodies. That is, this lover still finds the pursuit of beautiful bodies necessary, but, having become aware that beauty is what is worthy of his pursuit, he counts himself a lover of all beautiful bodies. At this point, while the lover's increased understanding of beauty does lessen his attraction to his particular beloved it does not put an end to his love of beauty; if anything, it makes the lover more aware that this is what he loves.

It is then, after coming to see that beauty is what merits his concern, and thus considering that there are higher forms of beauty than that of the body, that the lover turns to beauty of soul (210b6-7). At this stage, the final stage containing eros, the lover

loves someone with a fitting soul. Diotima still adds that beauty of body, at least a touch of it, is necessary (210b8-c1), confirming that eros requires sexual attraction, but the concern for the beloved's soul is primary. Therefore, this lover begets and seeks such speeches as make the young (and therefore the beloved) better (210c1-3). This reminds of Diotima's description of the love of those pregnant in soul (209b5-c3), but here, in her portrayal of a lover who ascends the ladder of love, she adds that this lover "seeks" the needed speeches, whereas she said the lover described earlier is "immediately furnished" with speeches (209b8). In order to ascend, the lover's care for the beloved must be sufficiently great to compel him to admit his ignorance and to seek what would truly benefit his beloved.⁶⁵ Seeking to make the beloved better, the lover is now "compelled" to view the beauty of laws and practices (210c3-4). Whatever attraction the lover may feel for the law is secondary to his attraction to his beloved; it is eros' capacity to arouse the lover's interest in law, spurring his investigation of it, that provides for the crucial step from the erotic to the philosophic life.

What is the result of the lover's investigation? Looking at the beauty of laws and practices, the lover "sees that it is all akin to itself, in order that he may believe the beauty concerning the body to be something small" (210c4-6). This appears to be the crucial step, for after this, the (former) lover turns to the beauty of the sciences, and eros drops out of the account (210c6ff.). We are not told, however, by what common characteristic the lover recognizes the kinship of the beauty of diverse laws and practices. We are told that the lover comes to see that beauty concerning the body is something small, and we

⁶⁵ In this regard, we are reminded of the followers of Zeus in Socrates' palinode (*Phdr.* 252e1-253b1).

saw that beauty of body was still of some concern to the lover at the outset of this step. Therefore, Diotima's remark about the smallness of this beauty could indicate that the lover is prepared for the end of his eros, since, as we have seen, eros includes sexual attraction. Yet Diotima only says that the beauty concerning the body is small, not that it is unattractive. Also, Diotima refers now to the beauty "concerning" the body, whereas before she spoke of the beauty "of" or "on" bodies (cf. 210c5 with b1-5); the class of beauty concerning or pertaining to the body seems to be a broader class. Given that Diotima is describing a turn from the beauty of laws and practices to that of the sciences, we are led to wonder whether the beauty of laws and practices does not pertain to the body.⁶⁶ Surely at least many laws and practices aim at the good of the body. If the beautiful laws and practices do not aim at the body's benefit, then they must aim at that of the soul, and Diotima will ultimately indicate that there is only one practice, if we can call it that, which is needed for the soul's perfection, namely, the knowledge of beauty (211d1-212a5). Thus, Diotima seems to imply that the beauty pertaining to the body that one comes to think small includes that of the beneficial laws and practices. It makes sense that a lover who sought these laws and practices for the sake of improving his beloved's soul would come to think their beauty "small" upon seeing that they in fact were concerned with the body, but, to one who has not yet seen true beauty, there may still appear to be beautiful laws and practices which benefit the soul. What would motivate the lover's turn away from these, and what would prepare his realization that many of the beautiful laws and practices in fact aim at the body's good?

⁶⁶ Cf. Strauss (2001, 85-86, 94); cf. *Rep.* 518d9-e2.

Diotima tells us that the lover comes to see that the beauty of laws and practices is all of one kind (210c4-5), and, although she does not offer an explicit definition of this kind, she does mention one characteristic that all the laws and practices possess: they are all sought in order to make the young better. The lover is therefore studying the beautiful laws and practices with a view to their goodness as well as their beauty. That is, he investigates the beautiful laws and practices while subjecting them, more or less consciously, to the standard of the human good. We may then presume that the lover's attraction to the law is not free of the hope that the law be good for both his beloved and himself, and as we have already noted, this attraction to law, the belief in its goodness, is similar in character to the lover's view of his love (see pages 233-235 above). But, as we have also noted, the lover must be "compelled" to look at the laws and practices, and therefore his attraction to law lacks the natural force characteristic of eros. Lacking such forceful attraction to law, the lover will be more likely to make the question of the goodness of law explicit to himself, and in his attempt to answer this question, he will be less inclined to accept an inadequate account of his attraction to law, an account analogous to those that Diotima had tried to offer Socrates with regard to eros, which would cover over the hopes that the concern for law permits by reference to some other pleasure or benefit that follows from lawful obedience. The lover is therefore likely, if his inquiry is thorough, to come to acknowledge his hope that the law be good, but with the lover's acknowledgement of this hope would come the undermining of its basis. And the greater awareness of his concern for his own good that accompanies the lover's completed investigation of the beautiful laws and practices would necessarily also have

an effect on his eros, provoking an inquiry of eros whose outcome would be similar to that of the study of law. Therefore it is the awareness that he had sought the beautiful laws and practices as something beneficial, i.e., the awareness of his concern to improve his beloved and himself by means of these beautiful laws and practices, that proves to be the first step in an investigation of law whose ultimate result would be the lover's freedom from eros. We may add that for someone for whom the charm of beautiful laws and practices has been dispelled the aim of many laws to provide for the bodily welfare of fellow citizens may be easier to admit, and admitting this, to consider their beauty "small".

Diotima therefore presents the next stage in such a manner as to draw attention to the concern for the good characteristic of the previous stage. That is, she says of the one viewing the sciences that he will no longer "as a servant, cherish the beauty of one little boy, or some human being, or one practice, being a base and petty slave" (210d1-3), and she thereby presents the lover's dedication to his beloved, i.e., the concern with the beloved's benefit, in a negative light, calling it servile and slavish. She then completes the contrast with the lover of the previous step by referring to the speeches of the one who now views the beauty of the sciences as "beautiful and magnificent" (210d5), making no reference to their being beneficial. These speeches surely are also beneficial, at least in so far as making them or hearing those of another strengthens one for the final sight of the beautiful itself,⁶⁷ and therefore Diotima's omission of the benefit of these

⁶⁷ Another peculiarity in Diotima's listing of the steps of the ladder of love may further suggest that the sciences are beneficial. She says that a lover ascends "from the beautiful bodies to the beautiful practices, and from the practices to the beautiful learnings, and from the learnings to that beautiful learning" that is of the beautiful itself (211c4-7). In each case she refers to the step on which one is entering as beautiful, but

speeches may be taken as serving the purpose of calling attention to the concern with the good characteristic of the previous stage, the last stage containing eros. In this way, Diotima supports our interpretation of the previous section, according to which the awareness of one's concern for the good would undermine erotic devotion.

Perhaps we may also now explain why Diotima has added the final rung to the ladder, despite our suggestion that eros would cease when one attains knowledge of the beauty one seeks, and therefore that the knowledge attained at the final rung should be attained at the outset of the turn to the sciences. Diotima's intention of highlighting the concern with the good characteristic of the second stage has led her to present at the third, where she first mentions philosophy (210d6), a depiction of the concern for the sciences that is limited to their beauty. Now one who has undertaken the investigation of the beauty of laws and practices described at the second stage, will have had, sooner or later, to raise the scientific question, "what is beauty?" and he will thereby gain a glimpse of the beauty of the sciences. Furthermore, we may add, due to Diotima's suggestion that the turn to the sciences is accompanied by freedom from eros, that the freedom from eros gained by completing the investigation of the beautiful is a necessary prerequisite for the full appreciation of the sciences, because with freedom from eros would come freedom from the irrationality characteristic of lovers, which they display when they contradict themselves about the goodness of beauty (cf. 201b9-c9, 204d5-205b3). For this is an irrationality on which lovers' hopes depend, and which would therefore render lovers

only in the case of the bodies, when she says, "from the beautiful bodies," does she indicate that the step is beautiful upon departure. Perhaps this means that while bodies, practices, and learning all have some beauty, only bodies are properly appreciated in terms of their beauty; practices and learnings are to be judged by their goodness, although one might come to learn this only after first being attracted by their beauty.

resistant to reason or science. But at the level of the third stage, there is no indication that one beholding the beauty of the sciences is motivated by anything beyond beauty, and Diotima's whole account thus far has indicated the predominance of the human concern with the good. Diotima thus adds the fourth and final level, restoring this concern with the good, and correcting the misimpression that her presentation of the third stage could have engendered. She does so by claiming, in however a rhetorical manner,⁶⁸ that it is at this highest level, in knowing what beauty is, that life is truly worth living for a human being (211c8-d3). That is, Diotima's speech, which has been dedicated to showing the inevitable priority that we give to the good, concludes by presenting the beautiful itself as this good and presenting this good as attained through philosophy. The ladder thus presents the ascent from an impure erotic concern with beauty to a purified philosophic concern for beauty which is also the concern for the good.

Chapter Three: Conclusion

In concluding his speech, Socrates leaves it an open question whether his speech was a praise of eros (212b8-c3), yet he says that, having been persuaded by Diotima's teaching, he tries to persuade others that they will not easily find a better helper for human nature than eros (212b2-4). The reason for this is indicated in his speech. Socrates' teaching about eros is a harsh teaching, but it is so because of the harshness of the situation in which he believes we live. Our situation, even in the best of circumstances, is one which we are inclined to forget. What we wish for by nature

⁶⁸ Cf. Strauss (2001, 238).

appears impossible to attain, and we are therefore disinclined to admit our deepest wishes. Eros thus proves a helper for human nature; encouraging our hopes, it relieves us, if only temporarily, of the burden of our condition, but it thereby also opens us to ourselves, ultimately to the acknowledgement of our deepest longing. For one such as myself, however, who has not yet the right to claim to have seen the beautiful itself and to have experienced the happiness Diotima suggests may be thereby attained, what I believe myself to have understood of Socrates' teaching could seem but a bitter pill. In this situation too there is hope. For those like myself have the examples of Socrates as portrayed by Plato and Plato as we imagine him to have lived through reading his works; and in their lives and such glimpses as we may get into their confrontation with the difficulty that we also face, we find what we take to be living human perfection: full, happy human beings longing to know the world as it is. Beside such hope, we have the pleasure of even the limited clarity we have thus far attained and the longing to possess and therefore the need to know what is truly good, for ourselves and for our friends.

Conclusion

This study began with a consideration of the treatment of eros in Plato's *Laws* from which I drew the hypothesis that Plato's understanding of eros was one reason that the best city he would describe for all practical purposes, the city whose founding he describes in the *Laws*, would be illiberal by our contemporary standards. This means, among other things, that the city should seek to regulate its citizens' erotic lives by means of praise and blame instantiated in its laws. In other words, man's erotic nature calls for and even supports life in a strict pious community such as Plato describes. The subsequent chapters have presented evidence from Socrates' treatment of eros in the *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, and *Symposium*, which, in each case, supports this thesis. The *Republic*, the most political of the dialogues studied, offers the most direct confirmation. It confirms the thesis through its suggestion that eros is a fundamental impediment to philosophic rule. For philosophic rule was seen to entail the acceptance by the city's military class, the guardians, of a theology which denies the existence of providential gods, and our study showed that the eros of the non-philosophers, including therefore the great majority of the guardian class, was bound to belief in such providential gods. Thus, the *Republic* suggests that the erotic nature of human beings will lead all, except the very rare philosophers, to believe in providential gods and insist on their acknowledgement, in one way or another, by the political rulers. If the difficulty such a nature would pose to our contemporary liberal ideals is not sufficiently clear, we may add that with providential gods comes the concern for virtue by which the thorough regulation of citizen life is justified in the *Laws* (see pages 3, 50-56 above). This is not to say that eros

demands the specific laws Plato outlines in his *Laws*, but only that his understanding of eros is one reason that he would support those and similar regulations.

Socrates' treatments of eros in the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* then confirm the link between eros and religious belief suggested in the *Republic*, and they do so while deepening our understanding of that link, presenting eros as bound to religious belief as to its source. That is, Socrates presents eros in these dialogues as the source of religious belief. Furthermore, the *Phaedrus* especially, through its presentations of the experience of falling in love, suggests not only that eros is such as to lead to religious belief, but also that a strict pious community such as Plato describes in the *Laws* offers advantages for eros. In the *Phaedrus* we find that the fullest experience of eros, such as Socrates attributes to the "new initiate," depends on shame, awe, justice, and concern for the gods (cf. *Phdr.* 250e1ff.). Such moral restraint not only helps a couple's bond endure after the peak of erotic passion has passed, but also helps lovers fall in love in the first place, providing would-be lovers with a belief that they are the sort of beings that ought to be dedicated to another, and supporting the hopefulness characteristic of dedication. This is not to say that eros flourishes under all strict or illiberal legal codes (cf. *Laws* 839a3-b3), but only that a community whose laws direct its citizens towards virtue, providing them with the awe characteristic of such illiberal regimes as Plato endorses, offers eros helpful support, in this respect.

Finally, by understanding the link between eros and religious belief, we also found we could understand the second major conclusion of our study: namely, Plato's suggestion that philosophers are not erotic in the strictest sense of the term. For, if eros

in its full sense is bound to such religious belief as Plato regards as irrational, the philosopher, as the one who lives the life of reason, living, that is, in full accord with reason (cf. *Rep.* 582d13, *Phdr.* 249b6-c8), would need to be free of eros. Then, by understanding the unerotic character of philosophy, we can finally understand more deeply the problem which guided our study, i.e., Socrates' ambiguous treatment of eros in both praise and blame. For, viewed from the highest perspective, the perspective of what Plato regards as the best way of life, viewed, that is, from the philosophic perspective, eros is defective. The erotic experience as Socrates describes it is accompanied by irrationality, and thus cannot be wholeheartedly affirmed by the philosopher, but because eros is also conducive to leading us towards the philosophic life, as Socrates also argues, it can be regarded as a qualified good. Even from the highest point of view eros is superior to the lack of eros of an unerotic non-philosopher.

It may be of some help to briefly retrace the path we have traversed from the *Republic*, through the *Phaedrus*, to the *Symposium*, by which we reached the conclusions mentioned above. In our study of the *Republic*, we began with book five and the question of why Socrates proposes the communism of the family. Through close scrutiny of Socrates' arguments there, it appeared that neither the eugenics program nor the unity of the city are the deepest motive for the communism of the family; rather Socrates seeks simply to destroy the family without substituting some new bond attaching the guardians to one another.¹ To understand why Socrates would seek to destroy the family, we turned

¹ See pages 26-39 above.

back to the education of the guardians, noting the similarity between the self-sufficiency towards which Socrates would educate the guardians and the destruction of the family, as both would render the guardians more independent of one another. The self-sufficiency Socrates endorses then also turns out not to be for the sake of what he alleges, the virtue of the guardians, nor does it seem that making the guardians care less for one another would help them serve the city better.² Then, noting that book three's discussion of self-sufficiency comes in the context of Socrates' treatment of mourning, we turned to book ten's treatment of mourning, where we found mourning linked to irrational religious belief. In Plato's view, the tears of the decent come with and thereby show and strengthen their hopes for assistance from the gods, and the communism of the family thus finally comes to sight as a way of destroying those attachments among the guardians which inevitably give rise to mourning.³ If Socrates could free the guardians of such attachment, as he knows he cannot, he would prepare the guardians for their genuine acceptance of the theology he outlines in book two, the theology necessary to make philosophic rule possible.⁴

The studies of the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* then, each in its own way, confirm the Republic's suggestion of a connection between eros and religious belief, and they do so while deepening the suggestion, indicating that eros is bound to religious belief as its source. The *Phaedrus* does this primarily through the palinode's indication that the beloved's beauty is the cause of the growth of the soul's wings, the purpose of which is to

² See pages 39-48 above.

³ See pages 48-62 above.

⁴ See pages 63-66 above.

lead the soul to the gods. That is, Socrates presents in the palinode the experience of falling in love, and he highlights the growth of religious beliefs characteristic of that experience.⁵ The palinode's indications about the intellectual limits attending the religious beliefs of lovers, especially when paired with the indication of the superior rationality of the one who has ceased loving offered in the conclusion of Socrates' first speech, then further suggest that a philosopher would necessarily no longer be erotic in the full sense.⁶ The unflattering light this consideration sheds on eros is then somewhat mitigated if we recall the nonlovers attracted to Lysias' speech, the speech with which the dialogue began, for the deficiency of these nonlovers highlights the genuine superiority of lovers. The nonlovers who are attracted to Lysias' speech are reluctant to admit to themselves their dissatisfaction with limiting themselves to the mere pursuit of their own interest,⁷ whereas lovers can more fully admit to themselves what they most deeply desire, and in this respect lovers are superior even from the point of view of philosophy.

Finally, our study of the *Symposium* confirms both the suggestion that eros is a source of religious belief and that philosophers are not erotic. Socrates begins with a proof that eros is not a god and ends his speech with the suggestion that the philosopher is purified of eros and no longer sees the highest being as a god, implying that all other lovers will so regard the highest being.⁸ In the *Symposium*, Socrates does not present us with the phenomenon of falling in love as he did in the *Phaedrus*, rather, he complements the *Phaedrus*' presentation with an analysis of the phenomenon, an analysis that helps

⁵ See pages 159-169 above.

⁶ See pages 125-128, 169-174 above.

⁷ See pages 100-102 above.

⁸ See pages 184-186 above.

explain why human beings, i.e., rational animals, would be erotic. Eros in the first place consists in the combination of a desire for a beautiful human being and a wish born of reflection on our mortal condition, a wish that is usually deeply buried but which becomes manifest together with sexual desire.⁹ Since the wish in question thus tends to resist being brought fully into the light of day, and therefore one may doubt of its prevalence, Socrates must continue his analysis, as he may also have otherwise wished to do, distinguishing three kinds of love: love of one's own, love of the good, and love of beauty. These three kinds of love or concern are all present in eros for another human being, and Socrates draws particular attention to the primacy of the love of the good.¹⁰ This primacy is shown by our unwillingness, even when consciously moved by love of something other than our good, to believe that what we are doing is not also good for us. The presence then of this love of the good together with the love of beauty characteristic of a dedicated lover confirms that the erotic wish is indeed present and even flourishes in the form of hopes in the heart of a lover.¹¹ Furthermore, by pointing to these hopes as the outcome of the combination of love of beauty and love of the good, Socrates both completes his account of how religious beliefs may originate in the experience of eros, and confirms the irrationality of this experience.

But then is Plato's thesis that eros in the fullest sense is necessarily bound to irrational religious beliefs not contradicted by manifest facts? Are there not plenty of

⁹ See pages 201-203, 212-213 above.

¹⁰ See pages 214-238 above.

¹¹ See pages 233-235 above.

atheists today who deny the existence of such a connection between their eros and religious belief? If we could take witnesses at their word, if the avowed atheists who claim to love could be trusted to know themselves, then Plato's thesis about eros would be disproven. But the difficulty of assessing what people really believe as opposed to what they say would seem to be the first lesson Plato teaches every reader of his dialogues, if common sense and experience have not taught it already.

We may assess the adequacy of Plato's teaching by asking ourselves how well that teaching accords with our experience, our experience of ourselves and of others we know. Beyond this, we could question the avowed atheists who claim to love. We may ask if the hope and delight such lovers admit they take in falling in love admits of a complete articulation that does not imply the existence of caring gods: do these lovers not rest assured about attachments for which only caring gods could permit assurance? Furthermore, we may note that one has no small reason to conceal one's hopes from oneself if acknowledging them means coming to question the possibility of their fulfillment. Finally, we may ask whether the eros of these lovers who are lacking or less conscious of religious hopes does not suffer, whether these lovers do not display a hesitancy and fearfulness in admitting what they really desire of their beloveds, a hesitancy and fearfulness which can be explained by their reluctance to own up to their hopes? Who among us has never wished to pray, perhaps only with regret if he could not? And who has not, on another occasion, possessed by the thought of his beloved, felt as far as could be from the need to pray, as if his prayers were already answered?¹²

¹² See pages 212-213 above.

Beyond these and similar questions, I know of no way to settle the matter, and since there is no reason to believe that both parties to such conversations will agree on the proper interpretation of the conversations,—indeed Plato believes almost no one can consistently agree with him—it seems the matter will only be settled by each of us on our own, between our own hearts and minds. Still, to return to our introduction, supposing Plato’s understanding of eros is correct, what follows for politics?

Certainly nothing revolutionary follows. In teaching us the defectiveness of even the best regime in the *Republic*, Plato surely teaches that noting an imperfection in our own community is no reason to seek its upheaval, especially in a community in which the serious reading and discussion of Plato is still possible. By insisting that we regard as good or truly desirable only what is in the first place possible (see page 27 above), Plato surely indicates that any suggestions for reform must take their bearings from what is presently possible (cf. *Laws* 709a-712a, 739a-e), and we have offered no such analysis of the character of the contemporary situation as would permit us reasonably to suggest any changes to our regime. Still, since the investigation of what is possible would begin with an analysis of the present situation, the most immediate effect of Plato’s teaching could be to help those of us who follow it to understand the present. I can only offer here some tentative suggestions; I present them not as definite suggestions but as problems which this study of eros may help us consider more deeply.

In particular, we may note that our current liberal order has gone some distance towards Plato’s best regime, apparently providing for the freedom of reason, if not its rule, and we have gone this distance without making the sacrifices Plato requires of his

guardians in the *Republic*.¹³ But if Plato's understanding is correct, we should ask exactly how far we have come, suspecting that the attainment of true freedom of mind may not be so easy for a political community. Is there really such freedom of thought in the liberal West as the relative absence of its legal persecution might lead us to believe? Furthermore, to the extent that we have moved towards Plato's best regime, Plato's analysis of eros would suggest that this movement has not been without a cost. If we have not destroyed the family, have we not perhaps weakened it instead, forcing ourselves to bury some of our natural longings? And if these longings are natural, we would expect them to return, perhaps in new and veiled forms, which Plato's analysis of eros could help us to understand more adequately. If Plato's analysis of mourning helps us understand our grief, there is reason to suspect his analysis of eros could elucidate other aspects of our lives. Finally, if Plato is correct, and the resistance to freedom of thought is natural, if humans are happier in a community whose horizon is delimited by sacred awe, and if such limitation proves ultimately more conducive to the attainment of the human peak, philosophy, then to the extent that we have not fulfilled and could not fulfill the dream of a society permitting complete freedom of thought, Plato's analysis of eros can help us to cease regretting that fact. In short, our study of eros suggests that we should raise the question of whether ours is a community that is and should be dedicated to leading its members towards virtue and all that virtue may entail. It should go without saying that in raising such questions we need not forget the tremendous advantages that our current order provides, for we only seek to make some of our fellows awake to what

¹³ See Bruell (1994, 281-282).

may be deficiencies in our order, human longings that may be neglected or repressed, the awareness of which could permit more responsible considerations of how to respond to those longings.

Such speculations as to the practical consequences of Plato's teaching about eros, however, must take second place to the truly urgent question of assessing the truth of Plato's position. Where we left off in the *Symposium*, Aristophanes was about to respond to Socrates' speech, presumably to disagree with something in it (*Symp.* 212c4-6), and while Aristophanes is interrupted, and we therefore do not get to hear his response, it would seem that Plato suggests that we consider what Aristophanes might have found dissatisfying in Socrates' speech. Therefore, Plato would seem to suggest that one way we should test the adequacy of Socrates' account of eros is through another study, a study of what Aristophanes says not only in the *Symposium*, but also in his own plays, to see if there is some element of eros that Socrates has overlooked or misinterpreted.

To judge by Aristophanes' *Symposium* speech, however, Aristophanes' view of eros is not informed by a terribly pious outlook (cf. *Symp.* 190cff.), and it is the consideration of a pious outlook that raises for us an even more urgent question. We have suggested again and again that eros is bound to irrational religious belief, and while some readers may be likely to find the thesis that man is by nature a religious being congenial to their faith, these readers may be expected to ask on what basis Socrates could claim to know that these beliefs are always irrational. It would seem that those of us who have assented to Socrates' view of these religious beliefs have assumed in each

instance the truth of his natural theology. That is, in book two of the *Republic*,¹⁴ in the indication of the *Phaedrus* that the lover who learns the truth about the gods does so by investigating his own views, especially that of justice,¹⁵ and in the *Symposium*'s reasoning about the character of gods based on the human understanding of perfection,¹⁶ Socrates seems to have assumed that God must be intelligible on the basis of human reason alone. And therefore it would seem to be on this assumption that those of us who have followed him have regarded the religious beliefs of lovers as irrational. It is true that this natural theology is supplemented by an account of the origin of religious belief in the experience of eros, but it is not clear whether or in what way the rational analysis of that experience would contribute to the vindication of our assumption. To provide a satisfactory natural account of the origin of religious belief would be to rebut the claim that man's faith in the supernatural cannot be accounted for on a natural basis, but to do this is not to prove that the natural account is true. We must then return to our study of Plato in order to gain a surer grasp of the basis on which he believed his theology justified. To the believers, we believe this should be a welcome return, one which offers both them and us the opportunity to understand ourselves better, a return after which we hope to profit even more from our conversations with them. To those who clamor for us to give up the investigation, perhaps in the belief that our question admits no adequate solution, we must admit our inability to heed their advice, an inability that will last at least until we are shown how it is possible to live as a human being without concern for

¹⁴ See pages 64-65 above.

¹⁵ See pages 169-174 above.

¹⁶ See pages 203-204 above.

the true answer to this question, that is, until we are shown how to live with nothing more than the prejudices with which we happen to find ourselves, regarding these as no more than prejudices.

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