The Dramatic Prologue of Plato's Symposium as Introduction to the Dialogue's Philosophy

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

THE DRAMATIC PROLOGUE OF PLATO'S SYMPOSIUM
AS INTRODUCTION TO THE DIALOGUE'S PHILOSOPHY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICAL STUDIES

BY
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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
MAY 1996
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply grateful to the faculty of the Department of Classical Languages and Literature at Loyola University Chicago for their assistance as I wrote the dissertation. In particular, I am indebted to John Makowski, who directed this dissertation, and to James Keenan and Brian Lavelle, who served as its readers. I am also grateful to the trustees of the Arthur J. Schmitt Dissertation Fellowship, who allowed me to devote a full year to writing this dissertation.

The moral support of my parents, my two sisters, my colleague in the ministry, the Rev. Arnold zu Windisch-Graetz, and the people of Concordia and First Bethlehem Lutheran Churches in Chicago has greatly helped me in this endeavor.
Sacrum Meis Parentibus Carissimis
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Although almost all scholars have recognized that the prologue of the *Symposium* is a literary gem, few have given it the attention that it deserves. Despite the wealth of recent scholarship on the *Symposium*, the prologue has not received as much attention as other aspects of that dialogue have: the structure of the dialogue,\(^1\)


the speeches of Pausanias,² Eryximachus,³ Aristophanes,⁴ Agathon,⁵ Socrates,⁶ and Alcibiades⁷; the seating arrangement of


the speakers,⁸ immortality,⁹ beauty and love,¹⁰ lexical and textual matters.¹¹

Often when analyzing the Symposium, scholars ignore or merely summarize the prologue, even though they would not let any other part of the dialogue escape with such little comment.¹² Nor--


¹²An extreme example of this phenomenon is Miller, 19-25, who ignores the prologue entirely in his discussion of the structure of the dialogue. Friedländer does little more than give the historical background of the dialogue; Paul Friedländer, Platon, 2d ed. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1960), 3:1-3. Anderson, Mitchell, and Allen
with one exception\textsuperscript{13}—have recent in-depth studies of the 
*Symposium* explicitly connected the prologue to the heart of the 
subject of the dialogue, Eros. Instead most scholars have 
concentrated upon explaining the historical or cultural background of 
the drama of the prologue, occasionally alluding to the implications for 
our understanding of the rest of the dialogue, including Socrates’ 
description of Eros.\textsuperscript{14} Furthermore, David Halperin, the sole scholar 
to treat the prologue primarily as a dramatization of Eros’ effect on 
people believes that the prologue refutes Socrates’ philosophy of 
Eros.\textsuperscript{15} Thus, even those scholars who have explored the prologue 
have not fully understood the prologue’s relationship to Socrates’ 
presentation of Eros.

In order to give the prologue its due, this dissertation will 
examine how it is organically connected to the dialogue as a whole. In 
particular, this relationship will be shown by examining how the 
prologue dramatizes the philosophies of Eros espoused in the 
dialogue and how, contra Halperin, it vindicates Socrates’ speech. In 
summarize the content of the prologue and then explore one or two 
aspects of the prologue in their commentaries: Anderson, 7-19, 
explains the Dionysian allusions in the prologue; Mitchell, 3-17, 
explains primarily the cultural context of the prologue; Allen, 3-12, 
places the *Symposium’s* prologue in the context of the Platonic 
corpus.

\textsuperscript{13}David M. Halperin, “The Erotics of Narrativity” (hereafter, 

\textsuperscript{14}See, for example, Rosen, 1-38; Allen, 3-12; Mitchell, 3-17.

\textsuperscript{15}David M. Halperin, “Narrativity,” 95-126.
the dissertation I will argue that the dramatic action of the prologue is not an unnecessary literary adornment, but drama in the service of philosophy, for Plato uses the drama of the prologue to put in concrete terms the theories of Eros espoused in the dialogue. Thus, we will see that a portion of the text that seems to be devoid of philosophy is in reality as serious in philosophical purpose as the arguments in the body of the dialogue.

In making this claim, I will be arguing primarily against two interpretations of the Symposium. The first is that of the analytical philosophers, who claim that the prologue is not an essential element in the dialogue, but can be overlooked in deriving Plato's view of Eros. The second interpretation is that of most dramatic critics, who take the drama of the prologue seriously, yet do not always connect its action to the philosophies of Eros expounded in the dialogue. When the dramatic critics do interpret the prologue in terms of Eros, it is as often as not critical of Socrates' view. Their reticence to equate the arguments of Plato's Socrates with the views of Plato is usually well justified, but, as we will see later, in the case of this dialogue Socrates' views on Eros do in fact reflect Plato's own approach to philosophy.

The Analytical Philosophers and the Prologue

In the discussion that follows the term "analytical philosophy" will be used in a broader sense than is used in contemporary philosophy. The term will be applied to all individuals who scrutinize the logic and language of isolated statements from Plato's dialogues and largely ignore those elements in the dialogue that cannot easily
be analyzed in such fashion, even if they would not claim to be adherents of that modern philosophy. Thus, such a designation will include such diverse scholars as G.M.A. Grube, Karl Popper, Paul Shorey, and A.E. Taylor. This term will even include a few scholars such as Francis Cornford who acknowledge in theory the importance of dramatic elements but in practice ignore them.16

Against these analytical philosophers we must maintain that the prologue is an essential element of the dialogue as it now stands—philosophically as well as dramatically. That the prologue fulfills a literary requirement is fairly well accepted even by those scholars who disregard the prologue's philosophical significance, but that the prologue dramatizes Plato's philosophy of Eros is by no means universally accepted.17 Yet there is a good reason for approaching the prologue as a dramatization of Plato's view of Eros: Plato himself


17For a summary of current scholarship on the *Symposium*, see the discussion on pages 1-4. As will be shown, almost all scholars believe that Plato's dialogues are literary masterpieces, but many scholars deny that there is any philosophical significance to the ostensibly non-philosophical portions of the dialogues.
hints that the prologue can--and ought to--be read in this way. Throughout the dialogue the guests of the symposium\textsuperscript{18} state that Eros is a force that governs nearly all human behavior. Eros is not mere gratification of carnal desires between an \textit{ēραστής} and \textit{ēρωμενός}, but is the cause of all the good in society. Agathon credits Eros with the power to create peace (195c1-6),\textsuperscript{19} Phaedrus and Pausanias state that civic virtue comes through Eros (178d1-179b1; 182b6-c6), and Eryximachus says that Eros is a cosmic principle (186a3-b1), at work not only in bodies, but also in the sciences (186a7-187a1), music (187a1-d4), divination (188b6-d3), and the governance of the whole world (188a1-b6). Socrates goes even further: For him, all men are by nature \textit{ēρασταί}--men under the influence of Eros.\textsuperscript{20} All men love or desire because they value

\textsuperscript{18}Symposium, when italicized and capitalized, refers to the dialogue written by Plato; symposium, when not capitalized, refers to the fictional banquet described in Plato’s dialogue, the Symposium.

\textsuperscript{19}Unless otherwise noted, the line numbers of all ancient texts will refer to those of the Oxford Classical Text.

\textsuperscript{20}205a5-d9. The word \textit{ēρως} has traditionally been translated “love”, although “desire” is a better translation, since Eros is not limited to romantic love. As Socrates argues in the Symposium, \textit{ēρως} is the recognition of a lack of something and the concomitant desire to fill that lack (199d1-201c5).

In this dissertation, \textit{ēρως} will generally be transliterated rather than translated to prevent the reader from adopting a too narrow definition of Eros. At the same time, however, I have generally preferred to translate rather than transliterate \textit{ēραν}, \textit{ēραστής}, and \textit{ēρωμενός} for the sake of fluent reading. I have translated these three words as “love” or “desire,” “lover,” and “beloved,” respectively. On those occasions when I have translated \textit{ēραν} as “love”, it is because
Beauty and its kin, the Good (204c8-e7), and long for immortality (206ce8-207e4). To be sure, not all men are ἐρασταί in the same way--some desire bodies; others, ideas--but all are ἐρασταί. Thus, throughout the dialogue and especially in the climax of the speeches on Eros, Plato portrays all important human activities as driven by Eros.

At the same time, Plato criticizes actions ostensibly carried out in the name of Eros. Pausanias, for example, concedes that base men do love, but their love is inspired by Vulgar Eros, not the Heavenly one (181a7-c2). Similarly, Eryximachus sees two types of Eros operative in the world, one which creates harmony and the other which upsets the balance (186a2-b2, b5-d5). This point is driven home by Socrates, who says that Eros urges all men to procreate, but some beget ideas, while others, being less noble, beget children (208e1-209a5). In his description of the Ascent to Beauty (210a1-211d1), Socrates elaborates this distinction. He gives several objects of desire--bodies, souls, fields of learning, ideas, and Absolute Beauty. In all the dialogue's speeches--and particularly in that of Socrates--Plato suggests that a person may be influenced by Eros, but may not be loving the right object or loving in the correct way. Thus, it is appropriate not only to see that Eros governs the actions of men, but also to evaluate the type of Eros present in those men.

Plato is using it in a more narrow definition at that time. Thus, in the next paragraph, I have Pausanias speaking about "love", not "desire", since he views Eros primarily as sexual desire.
Since men can be evaluated in terms of Eros, this dissertation will examine the philosophies of Eros implicit in the action and characters of the prologue and will also evaluate these philosophies in light of the arguments made in the speeches of the dialogue. This dissertation will also show how Plato uses literary methods (e.g., narration, foreshadowing, verbal echoes) not to be an end in themselves, but to connect the actions of the prologue's characters with the philosophies of Eros expounded in the dialogue. In so doing, this dissertation will show that the prologue is meant by Plato to be not merely a charming literary device, but also a serious philosophical statement.

Of course, the analytical philosophers would not agree that the prologue is serious philosophy and we must examine, therefore, why they make short shrift of the prologue. Their attitude to the prologue is derived from their understanding of "dramatic" details in Plato's dialogues: For them, the drama of the dialogues is unimportant for understanding Plato's philosophy. Thus, they leave dramatic considerations (i.e., those parts of the text that cannot be reduced to logical propositions) to the philologists and concern themselves with various propositions stated by Plato. The tendency of analytical philosophers to examine a dialogue as if reading a treatise is seen in how Cornford names his commentaries. He turns Plato's Timaeus and Theaetetus into treatises: Plato's Cosmology and Plato's Theory of Knowledge, respectively.21
What lies behind this popular method of examining Plato’s dialogues? There are two driving forces behind it, one philosophical and the other historical. Because analytical philosophy dominates the English speaking world, it is not surprising that scholars often employ its techniques to study Plato. Scholars who have been trained in the methods of analytical philosophy know how to examine the language and argument of a text, but are not necessarily prepared to evaluate the import of dramatic elements. Analytical philosophers,

Also representative of this approach is Karl Popper who, ignoring dramatic elements in the Republic that hint at the irony in Socrates’ statements, portrays Plato as a proto-fascist. No better is R.B. Levinson’s In Defense of Plato (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1953), which replies to Popper without stating the dramatic context of Plato’s seemingly fascist ideas. For better replies to Popper see Diskin Clay, “Reading the Republic,” in Platonic Writings/Platonic Readings (hereafter Platonic Writings) (New York: Routledge, Chapman, & Hall, Inc., 1988), 19-33, and Jonathan Ketchum, “The Structure of the Plato Dialogue,” Ph.D. diss. (State University of New York at Buffalo), 1981.

Among the analytical philosophers there is disagreement over whether Plato had a unified system throughout his career or changed his mind over time. Especially debated is whether or not Plato’s views on the forms, immortality, the soul, and the state changed from the early dialogues to the late ones. For the former (“unitarian”) position, see Shorey. The notion that Plato developed as a philosopher over time was unanimously upheld in the nineteenth century and still prevails among analytical philosophers today. For an example of this view, the “genetic” approach, see Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, Platon, 2d ed., (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1920). For a survey of the problem and criticism of both approaches, see E.N. Tigerstedt, Interpreting Plato (hereafter Tigerstedt, Interpreting Plato), Stockholm Studies in History of Literature 17 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International), 25-62.

thus, are understandably less attracted to the prologue, which contains more drama and fewer propositions for debate, than they are to other portions of the dialogue.

Analytical philosophers, moreover, are following a long tradition in the history of Plato scholarship. Rarely have past scholars given the dramatic elements in Plato’s dialogues thorough treatment. Already in late antiquity, Plato scholars saw their task as merely collating the views espoused by the character Socrates in Plato’s writings; often they selected those statements of Socrates that supported their own Neoplatonism or Skepticism. In the process they ignored dramatic elements. This trend continued in the Middle Ages: Medieval interpreters were interested chiefly in Plato’s metaphysics, not his dialogues. They were interested in his metaphysics because they were chiefly concerned with the metaphysics of Neoplatonism, which they equated with Platonism. To compound the problem, they had little firsthand exposure to Plato’s writings: Until the early fifteenth century little of Plato besides the Timaeus had been translated into Latin and scholars of Western Europe were by and large ignorant of Greek. Scholars of that era

23The chief exception is Proclus; see page 21. For a good summary of the history of interpretation of Plato before Schleiermacher see Tigerstedt, The Decline and Fall of the Neoplatonic Interpretation of Plato: An Outline and Some Observations (hereafter Tigerstedt, Neoplatonic Interpretation), Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum, vol. 52 (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1974).

24Tigerstedt, Neoplatonic Interpretation, 10-18. Only in 1403, when the Republic was translated into Latin by Manuel Chrysoloras,
would obviously not have had a sufficient basis to appreciate Plato's dialogue form.

Even after Western Europe became familiar with Plato's dialogues again, there was no clean break with the previous method of scholarship. Neoplatonism gradually yielded to new interpretations of Plato's thought, but scholars did not give serious attention to Plato's choice of the dialogue as the vehicle for his philosophy. When Jakob Brucker and Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann in the eighteenth century proposed new systematizations of Plato, they did not ask why Plato chose to present his philosophy in an unsystematized form. Both men, though rejecting Neoplatonism's systematization of Plato, assumed that they could derive Plato's philosophy by arranging the arguments of his dialogues. They assumed that Plato, like any philosopher worthy of the name, must have possessed an organized set of doctrines and desired to set them forth in an orderly fashion. Because the dialogues do not arrange Plato's teaching in an orderly way, Brucker and Tennemann took it upon themselves to create that order. In the process they completely ignored the dialogue form.

The analytical philosophers, then, merely continue the medieval pattern of examining isolated arguments drawn from Plato's dialogues. But whereas the medieval philosophers had little first-


hand knowledge of Plato, the analytical philosophers have less excuse for ignoring the dialogue form of Plato's philosophy. By refusing to interpret the dialogue as a whole and instead focusing on isolated statements, the analytical philosophers are not reading Plato, but only select elements from his works. No matter how helpful their logical or linguistic analysis of arguments drawn from Plato may be, their approach cannot be called a full exposition of Plato since they leave much of the dialogues' content out of consideration.

A similar criticism applies to the esotericists, another modern school of Plato studies. The existence of an "esoteric" doctrine in Plato was first proposed by Tennemann. Although Tennemann eschewed secondary sources in reconstructing the esoteric teaching, modern esotericists derive Plato's true teaching chiefly from a few statements in Plato's late dialogues and from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. They dismiss most of the content of the dialogues as dissembling or ironic. In so doing they remove from themselves the

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27 Tennemann and the Tübingen School (as the modern esotericists are often called) hold that Plato had an "exoteric" teaching, intended for wide dissemination, and an "esoteric" teaching, which was passed down orally only to his closest pupils.

28 Typical of this approach is Konrad Gaiser, *Platons ungeschriebene Lehre* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1968). Most of the work in this school centers around ontology.

29 The esotericists' keen perception of irony sometimes allies them with the dramatic critics, who are discussed on pages 19-29. Some scholars, thus, are able to be in both camps. Rosen, for example, argues for an esoteric teaching that can be found through recognition of the irony in Plato's dialogues. See Rosen, xlii-xliii, as well as Tigerstedt's criticism of Rosen (*Interpreting Plato*, 79).
burden of a detailed exegesis of the dialogues. Not surprisingly, they ignore the dramatic elements of the dialogues as well, since they discount the dialogues themselves as "exoteric."

Dismissing the dialogues from serious consideration, however, creates several problems. If Plato's dialogues are not meant to be taken seriously, why did Plato write some thirty dialogues? The esotericists' half-response to the question reveals that they operate under the same anachronism as the analytical philosophers do: The esotericists search for an esoteric doctrine because they believe that Plato, if he was a true philosopher, must have had a "system." Because the dialogues are notoriously unsystematic, esotericists assume that Plato must have imparted his true (i.e., systematized) beliefs elsewhere. But the concept that philosophical works must be systematic is a thoroughly modern notion.

The chief error of both the esotericists and the analytical philosophers, then, is the anachronistic view that philosophy must be a completely systematic presentation of a philosopher's beliefs. Both schools force Plato to follow modern norms of systematic thought and logical analysis. They choose what pleases them in his dialogues and reject whatever does not conform to modern views of how philosophy

30Cf. Tigerstedt, Interpreting Plato, 76.

31Rosen, lx; Tigerstedt, Interpreting Plato, 16, 67, 87-88. Tigerstedt traces the presupposition to Hegel's influence on Eduard Zeller, who influenced Platonic studies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Tigerstedt is perhaps correct in detecting Hegel as the primary source of this notion, although scholars such as Jakob Brucker had attempted to systematize Plato before Hegel.
ought to be practiced. Such a method is not a study of Plato, but of modern reactions to Plato. If a modern scholar is to understand Plato’s works, he must forego the modern preoccupation with the proper format of philosophical treatises. Instead, he must examine the works of Plato in a way that respects the manner in which Plato expounded his philosophy.

This is actually the position of those who take a dramatic approach to the dialogues. Although scholars who take this approach do not agree on how to interpret the dialogues, they at least agree that the dramatic elements are as worthy of consideration in deducing the philosophy of Plato as the “more philosophical” elements are. Furthermore, scholars who take the dramatic approach explain the dialogues more fully because they study an entire dialogue, not merely some of its passages. This approach fulfills a reasonable assumption of exegesis, namely, that a hermeneutical approach that accounts for more details is to be preferred to one that explains less, even as in other fields of learning, the more complete explanation is preferred over the less complete one. Therefore, an approach to Plato that explains the “dramatic” passages as well as the

32 For this reason the physics of Einstein has been adopted because it is able to explain certain phenomena more fully than that of Newton. Tigerstedt makes the keen observation that the foremost duty of philosophers, like the ancient astronomers, is “to save the phenomena” (Tigerstedt, Interpreting Plato, 21). By this phrase he argues against those scholars who attempt to solve the difficulty of interpreting Plato by excising the difficult passages from consideration.
"philosophical" ones is to be preferred to one that explicates only the philosophical passages. David Roochnik argues this point well:

The nod must be given to that interpretation that incorporates more of the text as it is written into its account. The interpretation that recognizes the law of logographic necessity and is not predisposed to dismiss large segments of the text because they appear philosophically implausible will read the dialogues more openly and comprehensively than the one that does not. It will include detailed examinations of characters, settings, digressions and myths.33

The dramatic approach to Plato also recognizes the importance of the context of Plato’s philosophical statements. His statements are not isolated propositions, which can be studied in the abstract, as modern logical-positivism avers.34 His statements are instead part of


34Certainly Plato offers a number of propositions, which may be isolated and examined by themselves quite profitably. Cf. Whitehead’s famous remark: “The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato...I do not mean the systematic scheme of thought which scholars have doubtfully extracted from his writings. I allude to the wealth of general ideas scattered through them.”--Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, corrected ed., ed. D.R. Griffin and D.W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978), 39, as quoted by Charles Griswold, “Introduction,” *Platonic Writings*, 1. The real task for Plato scholars, however, is not to discover all the ways in which Plato anticipates the positions taken in the history of philosophy, but to explain how Plato uses an idea in a particular dialogue and how in drama and words he comments on that idea.
a dramatic context; if this dramatic context is recognized, often apparent contradictions in his philosophy will be resolved. Plato emphasizes the dramatic context in which a philosophical statement is given because he recognizes that language is ambiguous. Often a statement that is made in one context in a particular dialogue will be rejected in another dialogue—or even later in the same dialogue—because the statement is being used in a different sense.35 Hence the dramatic elements in a dialogue are crucial for understanding Plato's thought and for comparing one dialogue's arguments with those in a similar dialogue.36

The dramatic approach to Plato also gives proper attention to the medium in which Plato chose to communicate his philosophy. Plato chose the dialogue form, even though he could have written prose treatises, as some of his predecessors had done.37 Any sound

35As Rosemary Desjardins notes, Plato argues against many of his "doctrines," such as "virtue is knowledge" (in the Meno) and "knowledge is δόξα combined with λόγος" (in the Theaetetus) not because he was a skeptic, but because he knew that a statement could be interpreted in different ways. Plato never merely gives a proposition, but shows how the statement can be understood to be true and in what contexts it is false. Rosemary Desjardins, "Why Dialogues? Plato's Serious Play," Platonic Writings, 115-118.

36George Plochmann, "Interpreting Plato's Symposium," The Modern Schoolman 48 (1970), 32-33, rightly urges steering a middle course between "seeking an expoundable Platonic doctrine" and "doing away with all traces of doctrine by conceiving the dialogues simply as literary...exercises." It might well be added that the opposite of systematized thought need not be incoherent babbling. Plato makes distinctions all the time, even if he refuses to gather all his ideas into one systematic treatise.
interpretation of Plato, therefore, must explain why Plato used the
dialogue form. Analytical philosophy cannot offer an explanation
because it focuses on isolated statements of Plato, not on the way the
statements are presented. The esoteric approach simply ignores the
question. The dramatic approach, however, explains Plato's choice
of medium: Plato's early and middle dialogues ape Socratic elenchus
and are an application of Plato's epistemology of μαθηματικός: A teacher,
Socrates holds,38 cannot teach pupils by lecturing—as the treatise
format would suggest—but must help the students acquire knowledge

37Rosemary Desjardins is correct in stating that much of
philosophy before Plato had been written in poetry, often of a rather
enigmatic nature; Desjardins, 113. But there were other forms of
writing available to Plato. The historians had pioneered the field of
prose and the orators were writing speeches that were disseminated
as pamphlets. Several philosophical treatises had already been
written: Anaxagoras' On Nature, Zeno's On Nature, Democritus' Ethics and Physics, to name a few. If Gilbert Ryle is correct, the
panegyrics of the orators may have originally been delivered at the
same time the dialogues of Plato were recited; Gilbert Ryle, Plato's Progress (Cambridge: University Press, 1966), 21-44. There would
have been nothing unusual, therefore, if Plato had written prose
treatises or pamphlets as the orators did. Plato, nonetheless, chose a
more dramatic form of presentation.

Eric Havelock, Preface to Plato (Cambridge, Massachusetts:
Harvard University Press, 1963), 202-210, offers another explanation
for the dialogue form. Plato is the key figure in the transition of Greek
education. The earlier mode of education emphasized poetry and
mimesis. Plato made use of the technology of writing, which enabled
him to submit statements made by poets and other experts to
questioning (elenchus). Hence Plato, especially in the Republic,
rejected poetry as a means of education. Havelock's interpretation of
Plato explains much, but not everything, about the dialogue form. In
most of his dialogues Plato includes a fair amount of “dramatic”
material that is not always immediately relevant to the dialectic of the
dialogue.

38Theaetetus 149a-151d; cf. Phaedrus 275d-277a.
for themselves by asking them questions on a particular matter. Only when students are forced to answer questions and to have their cherished notions refuted, can they learn. Through the dialogue form Plato puts this theory into practice. He challenges his readers to confess their ignorance on certain matters and to attempt to argue better than Socrates' interlocutors do in the dialogues. Thus, the dramatic approach to the dialogues reveals that the form of Plato's dialogues reflects his philosophy and method. Form and content in Plato are inextricably connected. Since the philosophical and the dramatic are so closely connected in Plato, there are only two serious, consistent options: one can either reject the philosophical significance of the dialogues (the modern esoteric approach) or explicate both the dramatic and philosophical elements in the dialogues (the dramatic approach). One cannot choose some elements in the dialogues and ignore others, as the analytical philosophers do. The choice, then, is between the esoteric and dramatic approaches. Of these two the former is ultimately unsatisfactory because it requires a scholar to dismiss as trivial hundreds of Stephanus pages of often carefully crafted prose. Only an approach that explains both the dramatic and the philosophical in the dialogues--as well as the relationship between the two--gives the dialogues the full attention they deserve.

The Dramatic Approach and the Prologue

Merely saying that the dramatic elements deserve consideration does not, however, answer all the questions. Not all
scholars who take a dramatic approach to Plato agree on the significance of a particular dramatic element or even on the method a scholar ought to use to determine what the dramatic elements signify. This disagreement among dramatic critics of Plato is not surprising; after all, not all analytic philosophers agree among themselves on matters of interpretation. But this disagreement does raise an important issue: It is one thing to say that dramatic elements are philosophically significant and quite another matter to state the significance.

It is not the purpose here to establish a hermeneutic that will interpret all the dramatic elements in Plato's works. Indeed, Plato may not have intended for the dramatic elements to have the same significance in all the dialogues. But it is not necessary for us to have such a hermeneutic in order to interpret the dramatic elements in the prologue of the Symposium. As we have already seen, Plato gives a clue how to interpret the action and characters of the prologue: they are manifestations of Eros. The events, words, and characters of the prologue depict Eros at work in the lives of philosophers (e.g., Apollodorus and Aristodemus) and ordinary people (e.g., Glaucon and the unnamed friends of Apollodorus). The drama of the prologue also offers an opportunity to test the theories of Eros proposed by the guests at the symposium: The theories succeed or fail to the degree that they explain the behavior of the characters in the prologue.

39See pages 6-9.
This method of using the drama of the *Symposium* to learn and evaluate its philosophy ought to be distinguished from neo-Platonic or medieval allegorical interpretation. Although there is nothing wrong *per se* in investing the characters with philosophical significance or evaluating their actions in philosophical terms, it is wrong to import *arbitrarily* a philosophy derived from a reading of other dialogues (or even later philosophers) to explain the characters in a dialogue. These objectionable methods are best seen in Proclus, a Neoplatonist who lived nearly a millennium after Plato. He argues in his commentary on the *Parmenides* that Parmenides, Zeno, and Socrates portray Being, Life, and Intellect, respectively. When Cephalus arrives in Athens from Ionia (the home of natural science) to hear Socrates’ conversation with the Eleatics (the home of the study of the intelligible world), this action represents the soul leaving nature or the body in order to ascend to Intellect or Being. Of course, the trichotomy of Being, Life, and Intellect is that of Neoplatonism; it is certainly not a distinction elaborated in the *Parmenides*.

In contrast to Proclus and other allegorists, we will approach the *Symposium* in terms that the dialogue itself suggests. The difference between Proclus’ allegory and our approach can be seen in Corinne Sze’s and Hayden Ausland’s treatment of the *Republic*. Sze and Ausland rightly look to the philosophical content of the dialogue,  

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searching for the main points made by the dialogue, and then examine the drama in those terms. By so doing they avoid importing a foreign philosophy. Sze argues that the process of education, especially as outlined in the cave analogy in book seven of the Republic, is the central theme of the dialogue and that the first book of the dialogue dramatizes this analogy. Socrates descends from the realm of light (Athens) into the cave (the Piraeus, which is physically lower than Athens), just as all philosophers must deal with the unenlightened. There he encounters Cephalus, who because of his old age is as restricted in movement as the people chained in the cave. Cephalus shows himself to be a true troglodyte, a man of conventional wisdom. He remains unconvinced by Socrates and soon drops out of the conversation. His place is taken by Thrasymachus, a sophist who rejects Cephalus' traditional wisdom and Polemarchus' reliance on poetry. Thrasymachus is representative of those men in the cave analogy who have broken loose from their seats in the cave and can see that the shadows on the wall are not substantial, but have not yet ascended to the sunlight. Both Socrates and Thrasymachus reject traditional wisdom—the wisdom of those chained to their seats in the cave analogy—but Thrasymachus assumes that he is truly wise because he has seen the folly of his peers. Socrates, however, must point out that there is a much higher plane of knowledge, of which sophists like Thrasymachus know nothing. Like Sze, Ausland sees the prologue
as a dramatization of the cave analogy, but also demonstrates that the prologue portrays the analogies of the sun and divided line, as well. 42 Thus, Sze and Ausland have not arbitrarily chosen the meaning of the dramatic elements, but have allowed the chief philosophical themes and passages in the dialogue to govern their interpretation.

It is this concern for looking at the main topic of the dialogue that separates Sze, Ausland, and the approach taken in this dissertation from the allegorists. This is not to say that there are no difficulties in determining what the emphasis of a dialogue is. But as Ausland notes, interpreting the dialogue dramatically is no more fraught with dangers than interpreting it analytically or linguistically. Scholars have stretched Plato's arguments to conform to their notions of his "predicational logic', or his 'theory of ideas' or his 'political idealism'." Ausland adds, "[T]he truth is that the dramatic portions of Plato's dialogues are intrinsically no more susceptible of ill-founded, subjective or tendentious interpretations than are their hardest stretches of dialectical argument." 43 In reality, with the Symposium we are on more solid ground than with most dialogues, for although there is a real debate as to what the heart of the Republic is, there can

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41 Corinne Sze, "Plato's Republic I: Its Function in the Dialogue as a Whole" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1971), especially 93-244.


43 Ausland, 46.
be no doubt that the *Symposium* is chiefly about Eros.\(^{44}\) Thus, there is not as much room for disagreement on what philosophical concern ought to govern the interpretation of the drama in the *Symposium*.

The dramatic approach also differs from the allegorical in understanding the dramatic elements not only as a dramatization of the philosophy in the dialogue, but also as the setting in which Plato can discuss certain questions. Plato does not formulate arguments entirely in the abstract and then surround them with dramatic events that act out the philosophical arguments.\(^{45}\) The arguments of Plato's dialogues are dependent upon their characters and events. One would not expect Socrates to discuss courage with effeminate Ionian sophists, but with Laches and Nicias, two premier generals. Nor is it surprising that Plato debates with the teacher Protagoras whether virtue can be taught or that Eros is the topic at a party. The dramatic details not only serve as commentary on the philosophical portion of

\(^{44}\)James A. Arieti, *Interpreting Plato: The Dialogues as Drama* (Savage, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1991), 107, states that the dialogue is really about men creating a god in their own image, not about Eros. Arieti is correct in recognizing the influences of each character's personality in depicting Eros, but the dialogue is nonetheless about the longings and wants (Eros) of each person, even as he does create Eros in his own image.

\(^{45}\)See the discussion on pages 41-42 for a model of how the prologue was written in connection with the rest of the dialogue. In short we will see there that, while Plato most likely had a particular setting in mind throughout, the final edition of the prologue was not complete until the dialogue had either been written or all its details planned.
the dialogue (as the allegorists rightly aver), but often determine the matter of discussion and the direction of the arguments.

Yet it is not only allegorists who abuse the dramatic approach. Some scholars, most notably Stanley Rosen, view the dramatic elements as a vehicle to appreciate Plato’s sense of irony.46 Rosen, in particular, emphasizes the irony to be found in the dialogue because he believes that by irony the careful reader is led to discover Plato’s esoteric teaching. Unlike most esotericists, Rosen rejects an esoteric teaching outside the dialogues; instead he believes that the esoteric teaching exists within the dialogues. Careless readers overlook the esoteric teaching, because they do not ponder the dramatic context of the philosophical arguments, but a careful reader understands Plato’s esoteric teaching, as he sees how the drama of the dialogue undermines the philosophical arguments. For Rosen irony is the key to solving the dilemma of the *Phaedrus*’ and the *Seventh Letter*’s rejection of written philosophy: Plato never writes in such a way that the masses can grasp his esoteric teachings, but a reader keen on Plato’s irony can understand Plato’s secret message. Thus, Plato in one sense did *not* write down his philosophy (as the *Seventh Letter* states) and yet in another sense he did, using the veil of irony to keep his philosophy from the masses.47 In pursuit of this

46David Halperin has a somewhat similar approach, although argued on different theoretical grounds. The differences between the two are so significant that, although they can both be counted among the pan-ironists, I will treat Halperin separately on pages 28-29.

47Rosen, xlv, liv-lvii.
irony, Rosen subjects every last event, character, and detail of the *Symposium* to close scrutiny, detecting philosophical presuppositions behind the seemingly non-philosophical and observing any contradictions between the philosophy espoused by the characters and the philosophy implied by their actions.  

Rosen's approach, however, is not without its problems. Although there is much irony in Plato's writings and a keen reader of Plato will discern as much, Rosen overstates his case. Merely because Plato employs irony from time to time does not mean his whole corpus is ironic or that there is an esoteric teaching lurking in his dialogues beneath the cover of irony. If Plato's secret teachings were shielded only by irony, Plato could not have counted on their remaining hidden from sharp opponents. For if Rosen twenty-five centuries later can detect the irony and the esoteric teachings, certainly Plato's opponents would have detected them, too.

Furthermore, the dramatic elements are not fully explained when they are merely assumed to be clues for the detection of irony;

48 Rosen, xv.


50 Rosen, iv, quotes Friedländer approvingly to the effect that our knowledge of irony has declined over the last century. But Friedländer's observation is a two-edged sword: Not only would Plato's friends have been more adept at detecting Plato's irony, but his enemies would have been also.
the dramatic details of Plato's dialogues surely do not exist solely to add irony to the words spoken by its characters.\textsuperscript{51} This point becomes clear, if we examine the role of dramatic elements in Greek tragedy. Sometimes dramatic elements add irony to statements made in a tragedy,\textsuperscript{52} but dramatic elements perform other functions, too. They may allow the audience to understand better the plot of the play\textsuperscript{53} or the motives of some of the characters,\textsuperscript{54} or may add a realistic touch to the play, thereby evoking more sympathy from the audience.\textsuperscript{55} They may even undergird emotionally or dramatically a point made intellectually by a character.\textsuperscript{56} Often they work unobtrusively; the audience is affected on an emotional level, not on

\textsuperscript{51}Cf. Tigerstedt, \textit{Interpreting Plato}, 95-96.

\textsuperscript{52}Cf. Oedipus' vow to avenge the death of Laius as if he were his own father (Soph., \textit{O.T.} 264). Oedipus' speech in lines 216-275 is full of dramatic irony because he does not know who he really is; therefore, examples will be drawn from this play to demonstrate how dramatic details can have other uses besides irony.

\textsuperscript{53}Cf. the role of the chorus of suppliants who open Sophocles' \textit{O.T.} (lines 1-57). Oedipus does not need to be informed that a plague has befallen Thebes, but the audience does.

\textsuperscript{54}The motive for Oedipus' diligence in searching for Laius' murderer is explained in an aside spoken by Oedipus (\textit{O.T.} 137-140). He proves that self-interest, not mere altruism, motivates his action: the murderer of Laius might one day kill Oedipus.

\textsuperscript{55}Aristotle (\textit{Poetics} 1453b) was undoubtedly correct when he argued that a tragedy evokes an emotional response from the audience. The members of the audience identify with the protagonist and pity his misfortunes and fear lest something similar befall them.

\textsuperscript{56}Cf. the garb and posture of the suppliants in \textit{O.T.} 1-5.
Thus, good dramatic critics examine the characters, order of events in the plot, structure of a work, metaphors, etc., and then note how each element contributes to the work as a whole. In particular, dramatic critics place the dramatic action in its historical context and explain how it influences the philosophical content of the dialogue and vice versa. Rosen, fortunately, recognizes this truth, if not in theory, at least in practice; he has a greater dramatic sense in his exposition of the Symposium than his principles of exegesis might suggest.

A similar criticism applies to Halperin’s discussion of the prologue. Although Halperin would deny that he has adopted a pan-ironical interpretation, since he believes that Plato is as serious in presenting his beliefs as he is in refuting them by dramatic means, he claims that in the Symposium Plato “systematically goes about undermining and subverting the very theories that his philosophical personae propound and that many elements of the Dialogue systematically combine to promote.” Halperin adds that the dialogue cannot be interpreted wholly as literature or philosophy or some combination of the two: the dialogue appears to be both a literary game and a serious work of philosophy--and yet one cannot approach it in such contradictory ways at the same time. The net

57Hence Plato’s criticism of poetry in the Republic 10.598b-608b, especially 601b, 603c-607a. There poetry is criticized for its lack of real knowledge and its playing on the emotions of man.

result is a nihilistic interpretation, not far removed from a pan-ironic interpretation: "[T]here's no success like failure, and failure's no success at all."\(^{59}\)

Halperin, however, misinterprets Socrates' speech by making Socrates' Ascent to Beauty easier than Socrates intends. Since Halperin ascribes a much more positive doctrine of Eros to Socrates than what Socrates gives, Halperin is disappointed when the characters of the prologue fail. Halperin only focuses on those statements of Socrates where Eros begets amidst Beauty; Halperin ignores the statements of Socrates to the effect that Eros is always poor, strives for the Good, but rarely obtains it and loses it as he does. Since Eros is fraught with failure, it is not surprising to see such erotic figures as Apollodorus and Aristodemus fail in their narration of the dialogue and their imitation of Socrates. Halperin is wrong to conclude that the prologue shows the failure of Plato's "official" doctrine of Eros.\(^{60}\) The prologue confirms, not refutes, Plato's theory of Eros.

While Rosen and Halperin employ dramatic criticism to detect Plato's irony, James Arieti employs it to disparage a close reading of the dialogues for their philosophical content. Arieti, unlike Rosen, focuses on the broad sweep of the drama. Arieti rejects a close reading of the text, as practiced both by the analytical philosophers and by dramatic critics of Plato, because it pays too much attention to

\(^{59}\)Halperin, "Narrativity," 122.

\(^{60}\)Halperin, "Narrativity," 101-102, 104.
the details and loses the big picture. Arieti believes that the dialogues were not meant as serious philosophy, but as recruitment speeches for prospective students at the Academy. When these dialogues were presented in a public reading, the audience would have been unable to remember every last detail; thus, the broad sweep of the dialogue, not the trivia, must be studied. Plato uses dramatic elements only to keep the audience’s attention; each element is insignificant in itself, unless combined with others to form a major theme.

Arieti correctly warns against overinterpretation, but underestimates the importance of specific dramatic elements. Audiences are able to remember and appreciate small details in a dramatic performance. As the large number of lines from tragedy quoted in other works indicates, the more alert members of an audience can remember small details from a work even years later.

61 Arieti, 3-5, 7-9, 250. In this way Arieti takes a stance similar to the esotericists, who view the dialogues as protreptic to further, formal study in the Academy. See Konrad Gaiser, Protreptik und Paräneese bei Platon: Untersuchungen zur Form des Platonischen Dialogs, Tübingen Beiträge zur Altertumswissenschaft 40 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1959), 17-21.

62 Plochmann, 35, is correct in criticizing Rosen for treating every detail of the Symposium with such seriousness that he “drain[s] it of humor, drama, personality, vitality,” a trap into which Arieti rarely falls. Rosen sometimes borders on allegory. For example, he interprets the transmission of the dialogue through Phoenix to Glaucon as symbolic of the “rebirth of the Socratic circle through the instrumentality of the publication of the dialogue,” even as the phoenix reproduces asexually. Rosen, 15, n. 39. Rosen himself, lxiv, admits that his analysis might seem on occasion to be “too talmudic.”
Although some lines (and some plays) are more memorable than others and no audience can memorize every last word uttered in a play, the details of drama and dialogues are not bereft of significance. Keen members of an audience, as certainly existed in ancient Athens, would be able to follow most of the relevant details of a work quite well. An author, furthermore, must craft his work, because he does not know for certain which details will stick with an audience and which will not. In any case, since composing a work requires greater time, energy and personal involvement from the author than reading requires from the reader, every author imbues a creation with more nuanced meaning than can be fully comprehended in a single reading. Arieti’s minimalism is unwarranted.

Arieti, as well as Rosen and Halperin, demonstrates the tendency to nihilism that is sometimes--and wrongly--associated with the dramatic approach. This nihilism arises when the dramatic elements are seen as trivial or as only undermining, rather than dramatizing, supplementing, and altering, the philosophy of the dialogue. But such a nihilism is unwarranted. Even if Plato sometimes uses the dramatic elements to express irony, it does not follow that there is nothing but irony in the text.64 Nor do the dramatic qualities

63For example, Aristophanes’ Frogs is full of citations from the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles; e.g., Frogs 1138, 1156, 1172, 1182, 1187, 1206-1208, 1217-1219, 1225-1226, 1232-1233, 1240-1241.

64As Tigerstedt, Interpreting Plato, 96, rightly notes, “By becoming absolute Irony destroys itself. It can exist only as the opposite to Seriousness. And there are some matters about which Socrates-Plato is deadly serious. The ‘pan-ironical’ interpretations
of Plato's dialogues mean that he was less than serious in writing them to convey his philosophy. Dramatic interpretation of the dialogues should not be associated with nihilism or deconstructionism.

The dramatic approach, in fact, has usually offered a rather positive way of interpreting Plato. Friedrich Schleiermacher pioneered this approach by suggesting that a scholar needed to appreciate the dialogue form if he wanted to understand Plato. Schleiermacher rejected an esoteric reading of Plato and the attempt to reconstruct Plato's thought from secondary testimony like Aristotle's. He decried the practice of analyzing only the philosophical statements of the chief characters in Plato's dialogues (Socrates in most dialogues; the Eleatic stranger in the *Sophist* and *Statesman*); instead Schleiermacher argued that Plato's dramatic form helped one to understand his philosophy. Plato, a "Philosophical Artist," rejected "the ordinary forms of philosophical communication." His dialogue format caused utter confusion entirely overlooks the religious basis of the Platonic Irony and its inseparable companion, the Socratic Ignorance. Human life in general and philosophy in particular are, indeed, but a play. But this play is God's own play, which we must play in all seriousness."

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66For a full discussion, see Schleiermacher, 3-40. The quotations are taken from pages 4 and 5.
among interpreters because the contradictions in them gave the impression that Plato was "more of a dialectician than a logical Philosopher." The solution, Schleiermacher argued, was not to adopt skepticism or to view Plato merely as a writer of beautiful prose, but rather to recognize the Socratic method of Plato's writing. In order to challenge his readers, Plato could not write treatises, which offered solutions to readers. Instead he wrote dialogues that did not answer the philosophical questions directly, but allowed the readers to formulate solutions from the material given them. To understand Plato, therefore, a reader ought to read the dialogues in the order in which they were written and allow himself to be challenged by the dialogues. In this way, Schleiermacher argued, a scholar ought to combine attention to dramatic elements with concern for Plato's philosophy.

Since Schleiermacher's time, and especially in the last few decades, a number of scholars have paid attention to the dialogue form and the significance of dramatic details for the arguments in the dialogues. Although not all such scholars agree with one another

67Schleiermacher, 8.

68Schleiermacher, 10-19. Schleiermacher concludes his introduction on pages 19-47 by arranging the dialogues in an appropriate order and giving criteria to determine the genuineness and order of the dialogues.

69A number of general introductions to Plato have commented on the dramatic elements in Plato's dialogues but have covered too much ground to do a detailed analysis of Plato's works. See, for example, Arieti; Victorino Tejera, Plato's Dialogues One by One: A
on specific interpretations, most would assent to the following definition and hermeneutic of dramatic elements: A "dramatic element" is anything that is not a proposition for discussion by the interlocutors in the dialogue or the debate of the propositions themselves. Dramatic elements include not only the description of the setting of the dialogue, but also the light-hearted banter or pleasantries that may precede the more "serious" philosophical conversation, as well as any interruptions of the debate by seemingly extraneous circumstances. Also included as a dramatic element is any characterization of the interlocutors in the dialogue because a philosophical argument may be determined as much by the psychology of the participants as by strict logic or desire for the truth. In short, the dramatic elements are those details that may not be

*Structural Interpretation* (New York: Irvington, 1984); J.H. Randall, Jr., *Plato: Dramatist of the Life of Reason* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970). Supplementing these works have been a number of articles on isolated aspects of Plato, as well as commentaries on individual dialogues. It is impossible to include in a footnote all such articles. *Platonic Writings*, 301-311, has one of the most comprehensive bibliographies of articles and books written from a dramatic approach. For representative articles offering an overview of a dramatic hermeneutic for interpreting Plato, see Drew Hyland, "Why Plato Wrote Dialogues," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1 (1968): 38-50; Arthur Krentz, "Dramatic Form and Philosophical Content in Plato's Dialogues," *Philosophy and Literature* 7 (April 1983): 32-47; John Hartland-Swann, "Plato as Poet: A Critical Interpretation," *Philosophy* 26 (1951): 3-18. Dorothy Tarrant has shown the similarities in style and form between Attic drama and Plato's dialogues; see Dorothy Tarrant, "Plato as Dramatist," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 75 (1955): 82-89. For examples of a dramatic approach to an individual dialogue, see Hyland, 44-49, on the *Crito*; Wolz, 323-353, on the *Symposium*; Warner, 157-175, on the *Republic*. For more extensive commentaries, see, for example, Allen; Mitchell; Rosen; and Nussbaum, 87-233.
logically necessary for the argument of the dialogue, but may speak
to the less rational, more emotional side of the reader--a part of
human nature that needs as much convincing as the more logical
aspect of humanity and, as the Symposium argues, is a proper
subject of philosophy. The dramatic approach to Plato, therefore,
considers how these dramatic elements of the dialogue interplay with
the more philosophical ones.

Those who take a dramatic approach to Plato, thus, should be
interested in the sort of dramatic details that abound in the prologue
of the Symposium. Nonetheless, as stated earlier, even among them
the prologue has not received due attention. Dramatic critics have
tended to explicate how an entire dialogue fits together, drama and
all, or how Plato weaves dramatic elements into a philosophical
episode, rather than to look solely at the prologue.70 When they have
examined the prologue, they have not always shown the connections
between it and the philosophy of the dialogue. Thus, much work on
Plato's prologues remains to be done.

What work has been done in this area does deserve some
consideration. Sze and Ausland, as has already been noted, attempt
to link the prologue of the Republic to the rest of the work.71 Both

70 Roger Duncan, for example, puts the main speakers of the
dialogue in their historical and dramatic context, but ignores the
prologue completely in his discussion; Roger Duncan, "Plato's
(1977): 277-291. Miller, 19-25, in his quest for the unity of the
dialogue ignores the prologue.

71 See pages 21-23.
demonstrate that book one of the *Republic* is an integral part of the dialogue, not an independent work carelessly tacked on to the beginning of *Republic* 2-10, and that the proem is a μιμησις of the philosophical content of the *Republic*. Jonathan Ketchum, in commenting on the structure of Plato's dialogues, has acknowledged the importance of the prologue. Ketchum argues that all the dialogues of Plato have a three part structure, prefaced by a prologue. Even if Ketchum's Procrustean division of each dialogue into three parts is not wholly satisfactory, his acknowledgment of the prologue as a significant structural element in each dialogue is welcome.

More helpful in his approach is Diskin Clay, who demonstrates how the prologues of Plato's *Phaedo* and *Republic* not only prefigure the major themes of the dialogues, but are closely connected with their epilogues. Clay adds that there is more to Plato's careful

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72 Ketchum, 2-3, argues that all of Plato's dialogues have the same structure: a prologue, followed by a protrepsis (which raises a particular philosophical question), an incursion (an excursus discussing the presuppositions that underlie the debate in the protrepsis), and an exegesis (a new examination of the debate in the protrepsis or the beginning of a new, but related, topic). Ketchum is mainly concerned about the last three elements of the dialogue, but does at least recognize the significance of the prologue and its kinship to prologues in other works, such as those of Hesiod. The purpose of his study of the dialogues' structure is to prove that some of the dialogues (the *Republic*, for example) are incomplete and are not to be thought of as Plato's last statement on the topic. For Ketchum's analysis of the prologue, see especially 45-49.

crafting of prologues than the desire to create an organically unified work: Plato sometimes uses the prologue to link his contemporary audience with the times of Socrates and to comment on this connection. Clay is on the right path, but could add a fuller exposition on the philosophical significance of the historical eras portrayed by the prologues and the prologues' relation to the middle portions of the dialogue.

Thus, even though Plato's prologues merit more attention from scholars, they have not been entirely ignored. The same can be said about the Symposium's prologue. As we have already noted, two scholars have thoughtfully examined the Symposium's prologue: Halperin and Rosen. Halperin focuses on one particular aspect of the prologue, the ruse of Apollodorus' narration of the dialogue, and traces its effect upon Platonic epistemology and literary criticism. His article on narrativity, therefore, will be examined in the next chapter. Rosen examines the prologue's characters and the

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74 Clay, "Words," 122.


76 See page 4.

77 Halperin, "Narrativity," 95-126.
transmission of the dialogue, as described in the prologue.\textsuperscript{78} Rosen's treatment of the prologue, however, does not give due attention to the significance of the date in which the dialogue is set or to the fourth century milieu in which Plato was writing,\textsuperscript{79} and his "pan-ironical" approach to Plato occasionally skews his reading of the prologue.\textsuperscript{80} Nonetheless, Rosen's analysis offers a good starting point for further examination of the dialogue.\textsuperscript{81}

The Audience and the Composition of the Prologue

Before we investigate the role which the prologue plays in the \textit{Symposium}, we ought to have a working model of the audience of the dialogue and the manner in which the dialogue was composed. We must do so, even though it is nearly impossible to determine the state of letters in ancient Athens. Suffice it to say that a fair number of Athenians, probably the overwhelming majority, would have been unable to read the dialogues on their own. Since there was no

\textsuperscript{78}Rosen, 5-20.

\textsuperscript{79}Cf. Plochmann, 40-41.

\textsuperscript{80}See the earlier discussion on Rosen's hermeneutic on pages 25-28.

\textsuperscript{81}Mitchell and Allen have also written recent commentaries on the \textit{Symposium} and discussed the prologue, but their works are not as thorough as Rosen's. Both works, in fact, tend to be more philosophical essays based upon the text--sometimes ranging far afield from the \textit{Symposium} into modern philosophy.
printing press, few people would have been able to afford their own copy of the *Symposium*.82

We need not conclude, however, that only students at the Academy or a few wealthy bookworms would have been able to read the dialogues. Plato may have read his dialogues publicly, thereby allowing people who were not his students and even illiterate Athenians to hear his works. Such a possibility is likely, since the works of Protagoras, Anaxagoras, and Isocrates were read in public.83

But who would have attended such readings? Both Arieti and Ryle have offered highly speculative answers. Arieti has suggested that the dialogues were meant as recruitment speeches or brochures

82William Harris has suggested that only ten percent of Athenians could read and write. He bases this estimate on the assumption that ostracism is still the strongest indication of literacy levels in ancient Athens. At least six thousand men were needed to ostracize someone; if there was some competition between two candidates for ostracism--but not enough to ostracize two people--roughly ten thousand men must have been literate, or approximately ten percent of the citizenry. Harris also notes that no modern culture gained widespread literacy until a large number of subsidized schools were set up; their absence in antiquity suggests that most Athenians were illiterate. Although Harris' construction of Athenian literacy is fairly plausible, it is by the nature of the problem difficult to prove. Moreover, the number of mass-produced ostraca could call into question whether there were even ten thousand literate people. William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), 15-16, 114.

83So maintains Harris, 86, who argues from Diogenes Laertius 9.54; Plato, *Phaedrus* 97b8-c1, and Isocrates 5.26. Diogenes is admittedly a later source, but Plato and Isocrates refer to contemporary practice.
for Plato's Academy.\textsuperscript{84} If this is so, then the audience must have been fairly sophisticated; only people interested in higher education for their sons would have listened to the dialogues. Ryle, however, has suggested that the dialogues were read at literary competitions, where Plato's dialogues would have competed against the speeches of Isocrates and other orators.\textsuperscript{85} If this were the case, Plato's audience would have included a number of illiterate people who nonetheless loved a well crafted speech or dialogue.

In the case of the \textit{Symposium}, Ryle is probably closer to the truth than Arieti is. The dialogue was likely written not for philosophers or would-be philosophers only, but for an audience that would have loved the rhetorical flair in that dialogue. To appreciate the \textit{Symposium} does not require a philosopher's background or training in Plato's thought. Furthermore, the dialogue defends Socrates from the charge that he corrupted the youth; Socrates, the \textit{Symposium} tells us, never seduced Alcibiades and refused to have intercourse with him, even when Alcibiades tried to seduce him. Because the dialogue is in part a defense of Socrates, it is more likely that Plato would have wanted this dialogue to be more widely circulated than most of his other dialogues. And since the dialogue is

\textsuperscript{84}Arieti, 7.

\textsuperscript{85}Ryle, 32-43. Ryle claims that the dialogues could not have been intended for members of the Academy only, since some of the dialogues pre-date it. Nonetheless, he concedes that some of the dialogues, such as the \textit{Timaeus} and the \textit{Parmenides}, were written for the Academy alone. It is difficult, indeed, to imagine a general audience sustaining interest in the \textit{Parmenides}. 
within the grasp of most audiences, we ought to assume that illiterate as well as literate people heard the dialogue.

If the nature of the Symposium's intended audience can be determined only with difficulty, it is equally difficult to answer questions about Plato's manner of composing the dialogue and its prologue. Was the prologue written first and then the rest of the dialogue, or was the prologue written after the dialogue, so that it might better reflect the dialogue's content? These questions, of course, cannot be answered with finality since we do not know for certain what procedure Plato followed in composing any dialogue. Several later authors comment on Plato's method of composition, but their stories may be apocryphal. Diogenes Laertius (3.37) states that Plato composed the Laws on wax tablets; the dialogue was transcribed by Philip the Opuntian after Plato's death. If this statement is true, we can conclude that Plato revised his dialogues a number of times before publishing them. This conclusion is also supported by the remarks of Diogenes (3.37) and Dionysius of Halicarnassus (6.25.2-3), who note that Plato wrote several variants of the first sentence in the Republic.86 If this is true, then it is likely that Plato revised the prologue as he wrote the dialogue, so that the final edition of the prologue matched the thought and structure of the final edition of the dialogue.

Thesleff would go even further. He argues that the dialogue was originally published without the Apollodorus prologue (172a1-

174a2); then, after Plato had written the *Republic*, he added the Apollodorus prologue to the *Symposium*. In this way Thesleff accounts for the similarities between the prologues of the *Symposium* and the *Republic*, allowing the prologue of the *Symposium* to imitate that of the *Republic* and the body of the *Symposium* to predate that of the *Republic*. Thesleff's suggestion would explain how the prologue is so integrally connected to the theme of the dialogue—it was written after the dialogue was completed. But we need not adopt this theory to explain the connection between the prologue and the content of the dialogue. Plato may have known exactly how the whole dialogue would be written before he even wrote the first word. More likely, he began by composing the prologue, then proceeded to write the body of the dialogue, and edited the prologue to make it conform to the final edition of the dialogue. This hypothesis accords with Diogenes Laertius' statements that Plato plaited and wove the dialogue until he was satisfied and that Plato had several first sentences for the *Republic*. For our purposes, however, all that need be said is that the final form of the prologue was not complete until the final form of the whole dialogue was complete.

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Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen that the prologue has not been explained in terms of its relationship to Socrates' exposition of Eros. We have rejected the approach of analytical philosophy because it does not explain the whole dialogue, but only selected portions of it. And, though praising the theory behind the dramatic approach to Plato, we have also criticized some of its practitioners for ignoring the philosophical implications of the prologue.

In the next four chapters we will examine the prologue of the Symposium in four ways. In chapter two, we will see the purpose of Apollodorus' narration of the dialogue (172a1-174a1). Then in the following chapters, we will demonstrate how the prologue's connections with specific portions of the dialogue undergird Socrates' arguments about Eros: in chapter three we will examine the prologue's relationship with the body of the dialogue; in chapter four, the vocabulary of the prologue and that of the dialogue; and in chapter five, the prologue's relationship with the epilogue.
CHAPTER TWO

EROS IN THE TRANSMISSION OF THE DIALOGUE

In the last chapter we argued that the prologue is an integral part of the dialogue, connected to the rest of the dialogue by literary means and philosophical purpose. This thesis, however, is immediately challenged by the first two pages of the prologue (174a1-174a2): The conversation of Apollodorus and his friends seems at first glance irrelevant to the rest of the dialogue. In particular, it seems senseless for Plato to spend so much time discussing how the dialogue was transmitted by Apollodorus and his friends. Whether the dialogue is narrated and by whom it is narrated should have no effect on the content of the dialogue.\(^1\) Furthermore, if Plato wanted to choose a narrator, he would have done better to choose Aristodemus or Socrates. Both were present at the symposium and could have told the story soon after the events took place. As the dialogue now stands, it is told twelve years later by a person who was a child at the time of the symposium. Even if Plato’s choice of narrator can be excused, it seems entirely out of place for Apollodorus to describe his earlier conversation with Glaucon, who never appears elsewhere in

\(^1\) As Arieti, 96, notes, all the discussion concerning the transmission of the dialogue is ironic. The *Symposium* is a work of fiction, not a transcript of an event that took place at Agathon’s house in 416 BC.
the Symposium. In sum, the part of the prologue that establishes Apollodorus as the narrator seems extraneous to the rest of the dialogue. Yet, as we shall observe, the narrative frame is an essential part of the dialogue.

The Purpose of the Narrative Frame

One approach to understanding the Symposium's narrative frame is to look at it as merely a representative of a certain form used by Plato in his middle dialogues. Thesleff, in particular, has approached the question from this perspective. He argues that the narrated dialogue is a particular form which Plato adopted for a few years and then abandoned. This form was merely one of several that Plato used as he progressed from dialogues of question-and-answer to monologues. Thus, the main significance of the Symposium's narrated form is its close chronological link to certain early middle dialogues, specifically, the Lysis, Charmides, Protagoras, Euthydemus, Republic, Phaedo, Theaetetus, and Parmenides.²

But why did Plato change the form of his dialogues? According to Thesleff, Plato, as is seen in his first dialogues, was initially most concerned with defending the late Socrates. After his trip to Sicily, however, Plato set up the Academy and began writing dialogues to disseminate to a larger audience the content of his lectures. At that time he discovered that the aporetic dialogue, which had been

designed to portray Socrates as an honest seeker of the truth, was ill suited for expounding the philosophy of the Academy. Thus, he used the narrated dialogue, an adaptation from memoir literature, which was more suited to a general audience.

Thesleff's suggestion explains a great deal, but leaves many other questions unanswered. It does not explain why Plato chose the dialogue with narrative frame over other forms, such as the treatise, that would have been suitable for disseminating his views to a wide audience. In addition, Thesleff does not explain why Plato later abandoned the narrated dialogue: He merely states that Plato's late dialogues reflect his disillusionment after his second trip to Sicily. Nor does Thesleff explain the peculiar emphasis the theme of narration receives in the Symposium. For although other dialogues are narrated, few of them go to such great lengths to emphasize the process of narration. Nor does Thesleff explain why Plato puts the dialogue in the mouth of Apollodorus instead of Aristodemus or Socrates—or why the narrated prologue is an integral part of the dialogue as it now stands. Thus, although Thesleff is right to observe that the narrative frame is a stylistic convention of the middle dialogues, his thesis does not explain many important facets of the Symposium's narrative frame.

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3Thesleff, Chronology, 136, 181, suggests that in the first edition of the Symposium Aristodemus narrated the dialogue and that Plato later added the frame (Apollodorus) with its unmistakable parallels to the Republic.
Other explanations for the peculiarities of the narrative frame have been given by recent commentators. Socrates cannot relate the dialogue since he is praised in it. Apollodorus’ role as narrator questions the accuracy of his narration and the setting of the narrative frame forms a contrast with the body of the dialogue. Apollodorus’ presence connects the Symposium to the Apology and the Phaedo, reminding the reader of the connection between death and Eros.4 But these explanations, though correct as far as they go, leave a number of questions unanswered. If Socrates cannot narrate the dialogue, why must Apollodorus be the narrator? Why cannot Aristodemus narrate it--and in 416 BC, when the dialogue took place, rather than some twelve years later? Why must Plato cast doubts upon the narration of the dialogue? Why should Glaucon be introduced into the narrative frame? How does any of this advance the philosophy of the dialogue?

To answer these questions, we must understand that the narrative process has a specific purpose in the Symposium. For although Plato uses the technique of narration in other dialogues,

4 Allen, 4, notes that the narrative form preserves Socrates’ modesty; Mitchell, 225, adds that it prevents Socrates from destroying the coherence of the narrative. Allen, 4-5, and Rosen, 11, observe that the narrative form emphasizes the role of Apollodorus. Mitchell, 4-6, and Rosen, 7-8, note that the narrative form contrasts the date of the narration with that of the dialogue’s occurrence. Tilman Krischer, “Diotima und Alkibiades: Zur Struktur des platonischen Symposium,” Grazer Beiträge 11 (1984): 55, notes the connection between the Symposium’s prologue and the Apology and Phaedo. For the relationship between death and Eros, see also Diotima’s argument in 207a6-208b6.
only in the *Symposium* is it a major motif. Apollodorus is not the only person in the *Symposium* to narrate information he has received. Throughout the dialogue the characters are learning information and passing it on to others. Apollodorus recounts events that took place twelve years earlier, even as Socrates’ encounter with Diotima, narrated at the symposium, occurred twenty-five years before that. One individual after another claims that he learned a particular fact from another person: Eryximachus, himself eager to praise Eros, credits the choice of topic to his beloved (177a3-4); Socrates puts his beliefs about Eros in the mouth of Diotima. Phaedrus quotes Hesiod (178b5-7) and Parmenides (178b11) in his speech; Eryximachus, Heraclitus (187a5-6); Agathon, Homer (195d4-5) and Euripides (196e2-3). This motif of narration, furthermore, is underscored by the placement of speeches within speeches. Glaucon’s conversation

5Andrea Nye misses the point when she argues that Diotima must have been a real woman who truly taught Socrates τὰ ἐρωτικά: “The Hidden Host: Irigaray and Diotima at Plato’s *Symposium,*” (hereafter Nye, “Diotima”) *Hypatia* 3 (1989): 46. All of Plato’s characters are fictional to the extent that Plato employs real people of the fifth century in conversations which he invents. Nye’s belief that, since Diotima’s views differ from Platonic philosophy, she must have been a real person and her words in the *Symposium* must be the very words she spoke to Socrates is a throwback to the hopelessly naive notion of A.E. Taylor and John Burnet that Plato’s dialogues are the faithful records of actual Socratic conversations. Nor would Diotima be the only “made up” person in Plato, as Nye avers, if Diotima’s historicity is rejected. The Er of the *Republic* is probably also completely a creation of Plato.

6As Arieti observes, the guests in the *Symposium* prove their view of Eros with “proof-texts”; Arieti, 107.
is placed in Apollodorus' conversation with his friends two days later, just as Diotima's conversation is placed in Socrates' speech. First hand information is rare in the Symposium.

No other dialogue--not even the narrated dialogues--emphasize narration to the degree the Symposium does. To be sure, the prologues of the Phaedo, Theaetetus, and Parmenides discuss in nearly as much detail as the Symposium does how the narrators learned the dialogue. Phaedo and Euclides explain how they were present at the events of the Phaedo and Theaetetus, respectively; Cephalus of Clazomenae describes how he found a reliable source for the content of the Parmenides. In all three dialogues, however, narration is not a major motif in the rest of the dialogue. There is no passage in those dialogues comparable to Diotima's discourse in the Symposium. Nor do the characters in those three dialogues use "proof passages" as the Symposium does; more often than not, authorities are cited to be disproved, not to support an argument.7 The Symposium, thus, is unique in its emphasis on narration.8

7 Allen, 3, places the Symposium second to the Parmenides in terms of complicated schemes of narration. In terms of the tortuous path to the original dialogue, Allen may be correct, but the introduction to the narration of the dialogue takes fewer lines in the Parmenides than in the Symposium. More importantly, the body of the Parmenides is not concerned with narration. The Parmenides refutes various notions concerning the forms rather than approving any one solution. Although the works of Zeno and Parmenides are alluded to (127c5-d5), the purpose of the dialogue is not to establish a Parmenidean cosmology, but to emphasize weakness in Socrates' own views concerning unity and plurality. Similarly, the Theaetetus explores different explanations of what knowledge is--including
Why all this emphasis on narration? One can argue that narration serves a practical purpose in this dialogue: It allows Plato to use the *Symposium* as an encomium to Socrates.\(^9\) By having the dialogue narrated by Apollodorus and Aristodemus, Plato has added two more characters to the chorus praising Socrates. One of them, Aristodemus, is a lover (ἐραστής) of Socrates who imitates his teacher down to walking barefoot all the time (172b1-4); the other, Apollodorus, is a “Boswell” in his desire to know about the life of Socrates and in his admiration of him (172c5-6; 173d5-6).\(^10\) Aristodemus and Apollodorus, however, are not merely two more people who praise Socrates in the dialogue. As narrators, they preserve Socrates’ modesty. Socrates cannot tell how Alcibiades and

Protagoras’ dictum that man is the measure of all things (160c8-9, d8-9)—but none of the suggestions receive Socrates’ approval.

\(^8\)Rosen, 2-3, calls the dialogue “a series of recollections within a recollection.” According to Wolfgang Rösler, this motif accords well with the dialogue’s dramatic setting, the symposium, since the symposium was dedicated to recalling past events, particularly the history of the community. (Rösler goes so far as to see symposiastic poetry as a partial precursor to the writing of history.) Wolfgang Rösler, “Mnemosyne in the *Symposion*,” in *Sympotica: A Symposium on the Symposium*, ed. Oswyn Murray (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 230-236.

\(^9\)Cf Allen, 4; Mitchell, 6, 225. To some degree, all of Plato’s dialogues are encomia to Socrates. In no other dialogue, however, is Socrates praised so openly as in the *Symposium*.

the other guests were in love with him\textsuperscript{11}—nor for that matter how the guests offered somewhat ironic criticism of him.\textsuperscript{12} Indeed, Socrates cannot even be the primary source of this information, but Aristodemus must be. Socrates can only confirm that the symposium occurred as Aristodemus said (173b5-6). Thus, the unique emphasis on narration is partly due to Plato’s intention of praising Socrates in the dialogue.

By emphasizing narration, Plato also draws attention to the fictional nature of the \textit{Symposium}. The reader is not involved firsthand with Socrates, a fact easy to forget when simply reading a conversation between Socrates and other people.\textsuperscript{13} Plato is describing events that took place in 416 BC, when he was approximately thirteen years old—too young to have attended the symposium.\textsuperscript{14} If Plato were portraying a real event, he would have

\textsuperscript{11}Allen, 4; Bury, xvi; Friedländer, 3:1.

\textsuperscript{12}Rosen and Duncan believe that the \textit{Symposium} portrays Socrates in a bad light. Rosen, 20, argues that Socrates’ faults are revealed, “soberly and unthinkingly by Aristodemus, drunkenly and with real penetration by Alcibiades.” Duncan, 287-288, argues that Socrates is indeed hybristic in scorning his beloveds and forcing them to become his lovers instead, as Alcibiades maintains (222b3-4). To a degree, Rosen and Duncan are correct. The negative side of Socrates’ behavior, nonetheless, need not be emphasized. If Alcibiades praises Socrates with great irony, Alcibiades also criticizes him with the same degree of irony.

\textsuperscript{13}Hyland, 43, aptly notes that these dialogues are “imitations of imitations,” which, ironically, are condemned in Plato’s \textit{Republic}.

\textsuperscript{14}Ancient sources are divided between 429 and 427 BC as the year of Plato’s birth. See Diog. Laert., 3.1-4; cf. Johannes Kirchner,
had to rely on the accounts of the older pupils of Socrates like Aristodemus to reconstruct the events of the symposium. Plato, thus, warns the reader not to expect that the *Symposium* is an account of a historical event.

Yet there is a more important reason narration is emphasized: The process of narration exemplifies the main theme of the dialogue, Eros. As we argued in the first chapter, Plato suggests throughout the dialogue that all actions of mankind are governed by Eros. This truth applies also to narrators, for narration is a form of procreation, akin to the procreation of ideas, which is praised by Diotima (208e5-209b4). A narrator achieves a degree of immortality when his narration outlasts him, even as people achieve immortality by begetting offspring who outlive them and carry on the family name. Narrators perform their task through μελέτη, by which the natural forgetfulness (ληθη) is driven out and the continued remembrance of the dialogue guaranteed (208a3-7). Narrators, moreover, must be inspired by beauty, even as other men can beget ideas and children only when beauty is present (209b3-4). Only because the speeches in the symposium are beautiful can Apollodorus relate them to his friends: Apollodorus finds the speeches useful and moving (173c2-5).15

Eros is also to be seen in the interest that many people show in the symposium, for Eros is a lack that longs to be satisfied. Thus, an

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15Cf Alcibiades' comments on the beauty and lure of Socrates' speeches (215d1-6); see also Halperin, "Narrativity," 111-112.
audience always inquires for more information from the narrator, for the audience must satisfy its desire for the dialogue. Glaucon and Apollodorus’ friends ask for the dialogue to be narrated because they lack, yet long for, the words of Socrates. Since Glaucon does not know the content of the dialogue, he actively pursues Apollodorus to obtain the information (172a3-b7). Even Apollodorus at one time did not know the dialogue, but has inquired about it from Socrates and Aristodemus (173a8-b6). Likewise, Socrates seeks Diotima’s wisdom on Eros because he recognizes his own inability to understand Eros or to answer the questions Diotima asks (201d1-2).

Narration, thus, is an erotic activity. The narrators retell the dialogue, just as all men long to procreate. The audience listens eagerly to the dialogue, just as all men strive to fill in what is missing. As Halperin argues, the prologue shows that Plato’s theory of the erotics of the process of narration is both a success and a failure. On the one hand, both narrator and audience perform their tasks eagerly. Glaucon, Phoenix, Apollodorus and his friends are all interested in Aristodemus’ story. On the other hand, the narration does not seem to stick in the minds of the audience. Several people have heard the dialogue, but by the time their story reaches Glaucon and his friend, the account is so confused that Glaucon does not even know when it took place (172b4-5, 7, c2-3) Furthermore, the people most knowledgeable about the dialogue, Apollodorus and Aristodemus, are not good philosophers. Intimate knowledge of the narration seems to have had little effect upon their lives. Narration, then, as
Halperin suggests, is as much a failure as a success in the *Symposium*.16

This failure in the midst of success is especially evident in Apollodorus’ efforts to present a truthful account of the symposium.17 At first glance, Apollodorus seems to succeed in his presentation. He argues against several misconceptions of Glaucon concerning the symposium, gives the correct date of the symposium, and claims to have thoroughly researched this event. He states that he has even consulted Socrates about some details of the symposium (173b4-6). As far as Apollodorus is concerned, this dialogue, as it is about to be narrated, is free from error.18 But misinformation still remains. Socrates does not—and probably cannot—correct Aristodemus’ account; he merely affirms it.19 Too much time has passed since the

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17The *Symposium*, of course, is fiction. Thus, when we say that Apollodorus presents a truthful account of the symposium, we do not mean that he is accurately describing a particular banquet of 416 BC. Instead, we are speaking of “dramatic verisimilitude” (as Guthrie calls it), i.e., that Apollodorus’ account reflects the fiction that Plato wants the reader to adopt. See W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. 4, *Plato: The Man and his Dialogues: Earlier Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 336.

18Bury, xviii, believes that Plato was writing against an earlier account of the symposium given by Polycrates the rhetor. It is difficult to say, however, whether the almost polemical defense of Socrates in this dialogue was directed against an earlier version of the symposium written by someone else. Bury is right in rejecting any polemic by Plato against Xenophon’s *Symposion*, since the latter was probably written after Plato’s work and is set at a different time (the Panathenean Festival ca. 420 BC).
symposium for Socrates to be of much help to Apollodorus when the latter learns about the dialogue from Aristodemus. The passage of time, however, is not the only culprit. At the symposium itself Aristodemus became drowsy. Thus, Aristodemus’ account of the last portion of the symposium is not entirely reliable. Apollodorus, moreover, has edited the dialogue, making at least one interpolation. In addition, his account of the dialogue is limited by his own and Aristodemus’ memory: Aristodemus could not remember the whole dialogue nor can Apollodorus remember everything Aristodemus told him (178a1-3). Thus, Apollodorus can narrate only what he considers the most memorable speeches (άξιομνημόνευτον, 178a5).

Both the failure and success of narration can be explained if we adopt Diotima’s view of Eros. For her, Eros is a daemon who never achieves perfection—or as soon as he achieves it, loses it (203d8-e5). Thus, all philosophers (who by definition take after Eros) are not perfect (204a1-2, b1-5), nor will they be able to transmit knowledge perfectly to other people. Not surprisingly, then, neither of the

19 173b5-6: μοι ὀμολόγει καθάπερ ἐκεῖνος (viz, Ἀριστόδημος) διηγείτο.

20 Rosen, 9.

21 Rosen, 17, cites 185c4: Παυσανίου δὲ παυσαμένου—διδάσκοντοι γάρ με ἵσα λέγειν οὔτωσι οἱ σοφοί.

22 As Mitchell, 4, notes, this raises the question whether Apollodorus’ account is any more accurate than any other account Glaucon has heard or would be likely to hear.
narrators in the dialogue is infallible. Yet, like all men under the influence of Eros, they strive to gain what they are missing or have lost. For just as all men are constantly forgetting and relearning what they know (207e5-208b2), so narrators must practice (μελέταν) to retain their narration. Because of their natural forgetfulness, however, narrators will not be able to grasp and maintain the content of the whole dialogue.

The fault lies, then, not with the process of narration itself, but with the human beings who narrate it. When narration is portrayed in the prologue to be not completely reliable, this does not so much refute as confirm Plato’s “official” view that narration is erotic. The narrators and their narration must be imperfect, for the erotic is by definition imperfect. Thus, Halperin is wrong to hold that the failure of narration in the Symposium is an “unofficial” doctrine that refutes the “official” doctrine of the dialogue, which holds that narration is always successful. Failure in narration is rather a confirmation of the “official” doctrine of Eros.

23Thus, Apollodorus in the prologue emphasizes that he is not unpracticed (δοκῶ μοι...οὐκ ἀμελέτητος εἶναι, 172a1-2; οὐκ ἀμελετήτως ἔχω, 173c1).

24Cf Halperin, “Narrativity,” 107, 113-114. To Halperin, the problem of the narration of the dialogue is connected with the question of Plato’s beliefs about written philosophy. Thus, Halperin points out the difficulties of narration in the Symposium in order to show how difficult it is to interpret Plato since Plato is a “deconstructionist avant la lettre,” for Plato “exhibits a series of alternating doctrinal and counterdoctrinal pressures” which cannot be resolved; Halperin, “Narrativity,” 114.
If narration often fails to communicate true knowledge, where does that leave the reader of Plato’s dialogues? Plato’s dialogues, after all, are narrations—Plato’s narrations—whether or not they have a narrative frame. Halperin argues that the failure of narration in the *Symposium* is Plato’s way of undermining his own work. Plato makes philosophical statements and then disproves them—if not by logic, then by drama. Thus the reader gains no direct instruction from the dialogue nor even food for thought. For according to Halperin, the dialogues do not offer theories for readers to debate or even an occasional flash of insight that is all too quickly dimmed.25

Can we then, as Halperin implies, really learn nothing from the *Symposium*? Perhaps we cannot learn a definite teaching about a particular philosophical issue, but we are exposed to the process of acquiring knowledge. As the dialogue makes clear, that process is fraught with difficulties. Learning takes place when Eros-like—and Eros-driven—men recognize a lack of wisdom in themselves and pursue it through Beauty or the Good. But Beauty is not easily discerned; men are far more likely to confuse Absolute Beauty with its kin, the beauty to be found in bodies or individual ideas. Absolute Beauty—the only kind that can inspire true knowledge—must be described primarily in negative terms: Absolute Beauty neither comes to be nor perishes, neither waxes nor wanes; it is not restricted to one particular aspect of time; it is not a relative or partial beauty or one recognized by only some observers; it does not take a physical form; it

cannot even be described as a word (λόγος) or piece of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). Because Absolute Beauty, the source of all wisdom, cannot be described directly, Socrates cannot explain to Agathon his thoughts on the porch (175d3-7), nor can Plato teach any philosophical insight derived from Beauty. In fact, Plato cannot even describe in positive terms the sort of Beauty one ought to pursue to acquire knowledge. Plato can only sketch an outline and speak to his readers as uninitiated people (210a1-2). Thus, Plato through Socrates can claim to know all about erotics (177d7-8) and still not be able to communicate in his Symposium the definitive explanation of Eros and Beauty.

By reading the Symposium, however, we do gain something: not a positive doctrine, but a philosophical process, which is portrayed more than it is explained. In Socrates' speech Plato outlines, to the extent language can, the Ascent to Beauty. Then in the prologue's and Alcibiades' depictions of Socrates, Plato shows how the ascent looks to others. Lest the reader confuse the ascent with some inferior manner of acquiring wisdom, Plato introduces men in the prologue who ape Socrates, but fail to arrive at Absolute Beauty. Thus, by examining the explicit teaching of Eros as outlined by Socrates, by pondering the dramatic elements found in the prologue, and by

26 Symp. 210e2-b5. In this passage, the only positive description of Absolute Beauty is that it is eternal (ἄει ὄν, 211a1) and marvelous (θαυμαστόν, 210e4-5).
evaluating our own attempt to ascend to Beauty, we can learn how Plato says philosophers acquire knowledge.27

In all this discussion we (like Halperin) have assumed that Socrates' views on Eros are close to those held by Plato. We have assumed this, not because Socrates ought always to be taken as the mouthpiece of Plato, but because in this dialogue Socrates offers the most comprehensive explanation of Eros. Socrates' theory of Eros can explain the behavior of all the guests, but the other speeches do not explain the behavior of Socrates. To Phaedrus, Pausanias, Aristophanes, and Agathon, Eros is equated with desire for sex. These four guests, to be sure, claim that Eros has positive side effects. Phaedrus says Eros inspires heroic deeds (178e1-179b5). Pausanias claims a noble Eros will educate youths (184b6-e4). Aristophanes argues Eros releases mankind from feelings of separation (191a5-d5). Agathon emphasizes Eros' power in creating poetry (196d6-197b3). Yet the circle of lovers defined by these guests is much smaller than that offered by Socrates (205b6-7). By Phaedrus' definition, only Socrates is a true lover and Alcibiades a true beloved, since these are the only men whose exploits in battle are described at the symposium (219e5-221c1). Pausanias' 

27Belfiore insightfully argues that the purpose of the dialogue is to open up the words of Socrates (as Alcibiades attempts to do in the epilogue) and examine their application in our lives. All the while, Socrates refuses to become an authority, that is, to teach virtue by expounding a doctrine. Instead, our own efforts at apprehending Absolute Beauty (aided by a study of Plato's words) must direct us to the truth. Elizabeth Belfiore, "Dialectic with the Reader in Plato's Symposium," Maia 36 (1984): 149.
definition is little better, for despite his emphasis on Eros' pedagogical benefits, Pausanias is chiefly concerned with the gratification of the lover. In Pausanias' analysis, Socrates must be an odd lover, for Socrates sees education as an erotic experience rather than as a means to one. Aristophanes, similarly, would reject Socrates' erotics because it does not express itself in a physical longing for union with another body. Of all the guests, Eryximachus, with his notion of Eros as cosmic force (186a3-7), comes closest to Socrates' all-inclusive theory. Yet Eryximachus related Eros to bodies and fields of learning (τέχναι, not ἐπιστήμαι as in Socrates' speech)—and then only to four fields: medicine, music, prophecy, and astronomy. Thus, none of these speeches comes close to explaining the erotic behavior of all the guests, especially Socrates. To the degree that knowledge of Eros and Beauty can be communicated, Socrates comes closest to an all-inclusive explanation of "erotic" behavior.

At the same time as we affirm that Socrates gives the most comprehensive speech and, thus, ostensibly the official viewpoint of the dialogue, we ought not to limit Plato's philosophy to the statements made by Socrates. To give primacy to Socrates' speech does not require reducing the whole dialogue to that speech. First, Socrates builds on the speeches of his predecessors; without them Socrates' discussion would certainly be different. For example, if Pausanias had not distinguished between a base and noble Eros, or if Eryximachus had not universalized Eros as a cosmic force, Socrates would have had to spend more of his speech defending the notion that Eros did not operate entirely on the physical level. Similarly, if
Agathon had not confused Eros with what Eros desired and if Aristophanes had not stated that love is finding one's other half, Socrates would not have had to refute these beliefs (199d1-202e1, 205d10-206a1). Thus, the speeches of the other guests influence the content of Socrates' speech.

Second--and more importantly--Socrates' speech presumes that direct experience in the Ascent to Beauty is of greater value than talk about it. By this principle, evaluation of people as they attempt to ascend to Beauty is more helpful than merely reading an outline of the Ascent. Here is where the dramatic portions of the dialogue are helpful. The prologue and the epilogue (Alcibiades' speech and the breakup of the party) offer a different perspective of Socratic Eros: the prologue shows Socratic Eros as seen by his fanatic pupils; the epilogue, as seen by a disgruntled one. These perspectives are necessary for the reader to get the full picture of Socratic/Platonic Eros as caricatured by his friend and mocked by his rivals. Thus, although Socrates' speech may form the heart of the dialogue, the rest of the dialogue is not without significance.

The prologue, then, offers another perspective on Socratic Eros. All the characters in the narrative frame are in some sense students and ἐφασταί of Socrates. Their successes in pursuing Beauty are instructive, while their failures in imitating Socrates portray the pitfalls that one can encounter on the Ascent to Beauty. Of equal importance for the reader is the historical setting of the narrative frame, for two reasons. First, the setting of the narrative is a culturally and politically more impoverished time than that of the body of the
dialogue; the setting of the narrative dramatizes Socrates' point of Eros as lack. Second, the historical setting of 172a1-174a2 influences the narration of the dialogue; then the reader ought to ask whether such influences also affect him or her. Since these points need explanation, the rest of this chapter will examine the characters involved in the dialogue's narration and then the historical setting of the narration, in order to determine how they manifest Eros.

The Characters of the Narrative Frame

The chief character involved in the dialogue's narration is the narrator Apollodorus. He has been a devoted pupil of Socrates for three years (172c4-6). Naturally, he is acquainted with Socrates' views on many subjects (172c5-6). Presumably, the symposium is not the only conversation of Socrates that he has tried to memorize. Apollodorus, moreover, stays with Socrates until the latter dies. Apollodorus' interest in philosophy seems genuine: Unlike his

28As we evaluate the characters, we must be careful not to pit the "imperfect pupils" such as Apollodorus against their "wise teacher," Socrates; the characters in the prologue are too complex to be simply foils for Socrates. Nor is it helpful to analyze the characters as representatives of a particular vice. They are philosophers who have some frailties, which any student of philosophy may share. Cf. Plochmann's criticism of Rosen, 34, 38; Gallagher, 40-42.

29Socrates in the Apology (34a2; 38b7) names Apollodorus as one of his followers at the time of the trial.

30This is attested by both Plato (Phd. 59a-b, 117d) and Xenophon (Ap. 28).
contemporaries mentioned in the Apology (23c2-7), he is not merely interested in watching Socrates prove the learned men wrong, but desires philosophy for its usefulness (Symposium 173c2-5).

Apollodorus, nonetheless, has two key weaknesses. First, he is highly emotional, as is evident from his nickname μαλακός, “softy”31; he not only bawls at Socrates’ death (Phdl. 117d3-4), but he also goes on lengthy tirades against his friends.32 Second, in his zeal to honor Socrates he distorts Socrates’ philosophy. Apollodorus ascribes more bliss and knowledge to Socrates than Socrates himself would

31 Is the proper reading μαλακός, “softy,” or μανικός, “mad man”? For the textual evidence, see Georg Ferdinand Rettig, platonis symposium in usum studiosae uventutis et scholarum cum commentario critico (Halle: Libraria Orphanotrophei, 1875), 3. For an evaluation of the evidence, see Bury, 6; Dover, Symposium, 79; Friedländer 3:3, 431 fn. 5; Leonardo Paganelli, “Plat. Symp. 173d (μαλακός/μανικός),” Museum Criticum 18 (1983): 193-196. Rettig and Bury prefer μανικός, Dover and Paganelli, μαλακός. It is easier to see why μαλακός would be emended by a later editor to μανικός than vice versa: μαλακός, as Paganelli has documented, came to have an obscene meaning in Byzantine Greek. Yet, though I prefer μαλακός, either reading makes sense in the context of the passage. If μαλακός is the preferred reading, the friend of Apollodorus is asking why he got the nickname of “softy,” when he rants and raves so much. If μανικός is correct, the friend says that he does not know how he acquired the nickname, but agrees that it is an apt one.

32 Apollodorus, though a pupil of Socrates for approximately eight years by the time of Socrates’ death, still had not adopted a more stoic attitude to death. On Apollodorus elsewhere in Plato, see Guthrie, 366; Rosen, 11; Friedländer 3:2-3. Arieti, 96, sees the tirades of Apollodorus as a parody of would-be followers of Socrates. More insightfully, Allen, 5, notes that the narration of the dialogue through Apollodorus highlights the Symposium’s connections with the dialogues on death (the Apology and the Phaedo).
admit. Although Socrates claims only to be a seeker after the truth and to know nothing at all--or erotics at most (177d7-8)--ApolloDorus believes that Socrates has escaped the wretchedness of most mortals. In a similar way, Apollodorus mistakes Socratic irony for rudeness: Apollodorus criticizes his non-philosophical friends (173a1-3, c5-d3), while Socrates bestows ironic praise upon Agathon (175d7-e6). Apollodorus in effect congratulates himself, whereas Socrates deprecates himself. Consequently, when Apollodorus begins to boast of his happiness as a philosopher (173a1-3), Glaucon rightly tells him to stop jesting (173a3-4); Apollodorus is not so close to the Socrates he adores as he believes himself to be.

33Diotima remarks that the wise do not philosophize because they already possess wisdom (204a1-4), but Apollodorus believes that Socrates has escaped from the wretches of ignorance (173d4-5). Socrates' self-deprecation is, admittedly, ironic; he always seems to know more than he lets on. For example, Socrates claims that his knowledge is inferior to Agathon's (175e1-6; 198b1-c5) and then upstages him with his own encomium. Yet Socrates would be the first to admit that he has not achieved his goal as a philosopher (212b1-8).

34Cf. Rosen, 14, who notes that whereas Socrates in the Republic uses irony with Polemarchus and Cephalus, Apollodorus is actually rude to his friends. Warner, 161, notes that the best picture we get of Socrates is not from his pupil Apollodorus, but from "the unconverted Alcibiades"; similarly, in the prologue we are more apt to identify with the unnamed "friends" than with "mad" Apollodorus.

35Apollodorus is willing to concede that he has not entered total bliss and that he is probably κακοδαιμόν (173d1-2). But his statement that his friends are certainly κακοδαιμονες (173d2-3) reflects a presumptuous attitude on his part.
Apollo
dorus finds a counterpart to himself in Aristodemus. Aristodemus, like Apollodorus, has several admirable qualities. He follows Socrates closely, down to imitating such details as being shoeless (173b2).\(^{37}\) He is so faithful to Socrates that he is even called an \(\varepsilon \rho \alpha \sigma \tau \iota \varsigma\) (lover) of Socrates—even though Aristodemus, as the junior of the two, should technically be called the \(\varepsilon \rho \omega \mu \epsilon \nu \omicron \omicron \varsigma\).\(^{38}\) For these reasons he evokes the reader’s respect and admiration.

Yet Aristodemus is not without his faults. Like Apollodorus, he appears to have acquired the demeanor of Socrates without his wisdom. He is shoeless, for example, just as Socrates usually is, even though Socrates knows enough to come well dressed for Agathon’s

\(^{36}\)Anderson, 110, insightfully notes that Apollodorus is “more concerned with form than with understanding.” Though he is a faithful narrator of the events of the symposium, he does not seem to comprehend their significance.

\(^{37}\)Bury, xvi, sees Aristodemus as another “Boswell” in his fascination with the smallest details of his teacher’s life. Although such a reading is a bit simplistic, it does account for one aspect of Aristodemus’ character.

\(^{38}\)Although, as Bury, 4, notes, the word \(\varepsilon \rho \alpha \sigma \tau \iota \varsigma\) can be used in a broader sense, i.e., “admirer,” almost as a synonym for \(\varepsilon \tau \alpha \iota \rho \omicron \varsigma\), the \(\varepsilon \rho \alpha \sigma \tau \iota \varsigma\), properly speaking, is the active partner in the sexual relationship; the \(\varepsilon \rho \omega \mu \epsilon \nu \omicron \omicron \varsigma\), the passive one. That the younger man, Aristodemus, is called the \(\varepsilon \rho \alpha \sigma \tau \iota \varsigma\) in 173b3, shows that the more aggressive individual in this relationship was Aristodemus, in spite of the fact that Socrates was well known for his fondness for young lads. Cf. Alcibiades’ aggressive quest to be the passive partner in an \(\varepsilon \rho \alpha \sigma \tau \iota \varsigma – \varepsilon \rho \omega \mu \epsilon \nu \omicron \omicron \varsigma\) relationship and Nussbaum’s commentary on it, 188-189. As Alcibiades complains, Socrates forces his \(\pi \alpha \iota \delta \iota \kappa \alpha\) (i.e., his \(\varepsilon \rho \omega \mu \epsilon \nu \omicron \omicron \varsigma\)) to become his \(\varepsilon \rho \alpha \sigma \tau \alpha \iota\) (222b3-4).
symposium.\textsuperscript{39} Aristodemus, moreover, probably left the Socratic circle by the time Apollodorus narrates the symposium.\textsuperscript{40} Aristodemus’ credibility is further undermined by his inability to recall all the speeches (178a1-5) and by his falling asleep during part of the symposium (223b8-c1). He may even have an ulterior motive for his interest in narrating the symposium: According to Xenophon,  

\textsuperscript{39}Allen, 6, observes that Aristodemus lacks all the qualities the other self-invited guest--Alcibiades--possesses. As the first speaker, by virtue of his being a narrator, he stands in fitting contrast to Alcibiades, the last speaker. Allen, 105, adds that, while Aristodemus will praise Eros by narrating the dialogue, Alcibiades will only praise Socrates.  

It is not necessary to allegorize Socrates’ and Aristodemus’ shoelessness to make sense of it. Social norms and the roughness of the physical terrain suggested that one ought to wear shoes, but on most occasions Socrates was impervious to the world about him. When he does put on shoes for the banquet, it is a sign that he can conform to society’s rules, when necessary. More importantly, Socrates demonstrates that he can accommodate himself to society, while Aristodemus cannot.  

Nussbaum, 185-186, argues along these lines, but adds that Socrates’ shoelessness reflects how impervious he is to the world when he analyzes Eros. Socrates analyzes Eros in the abstract, not as it takes place among real people. Thus, he and his Ascent to Beauty seems ridiculous to other people. Thus, he and his Ascent to Beauty seems ridiculous to other people. Nussbaum, 184, argues: “We are not allowed to have the cozy thought that the transformed people will be just like us, only happier. Socrates is weird.” Rosen, 17, however, goes further. He claims that Aristodemus’ shoelessness shows “lack of prudence or a courting of danger” since unprotected feet are more prone to injury. But Rosen is reading more into the text than is there.  

\textsuperscript{40}His defection from Socrates is implied by the words \textit{εραστής} ὅν ἐν τοῖς μάλιστα τῶν τότε (173b3-4). It can also be surmised from the fact that he is not the narrator of this dialogue and is not present at Socrates’ death or in any other Platonic dialogue.
Aristodemus was an atheist; thus, he may have been as interested in how men portray a god as he was in Socrates' philosophy. This theory is supported by the absence of any speech by Aristodemus in the dialogue. Although Aristodemus may have notionally delivered a speech at the symposium and then excluded it from his narrative out of modesty, it is more likely that he declined to praise a god in whom he did not believe. After all, if Aristodemus was too modest to include his speech in his narration, Apollodorus could have learned Aristodemus' speech from Socrates. In any event, Aristodemus' atheism makes his narration seem less trustworthy.

In short, the narrators have both positive and negative attributes. They are Eros-like in that they are philosophers who strive after the truth, but never quite attain it. Thus, we cannot judge them either entirely positively or negatively. We cannot, for example, follow Bury's wholly positive evaluation of the two, especially his assumption that Apollodorus' fanaticism proves that his account of the dialogue is

41Xen. Mem. 1.4.2, 11.

42Cf. Rosen, 17-20, for a similar argument. Aristodemus' account does not even hint that he gave a speech. He states that he sat next to Eryximachus, although it is unclear whether he sat between Aristophanes and Eryximachus or between Eryximachus and Agathon. Mitchell, 48, argues on the basis of 193e1-2 that Aristodemus must be seated between Eryximachus and Agathon. But Aristodemus claims that Eryximachus ought to have followed immediately after Aristophanes (185c5-d2), suggesting that Aristodemus would have been seated between Eryximachus and Agathon. Thus, the evidence drawn from 185c5-d2 cancels out the evidence of 193e1-2. It is as if Aristodemus had forgotten about not only his speech, but even his presence at the symposium.
trustworthy. 43 For although a fanatic like Apollodorus may memorize the words of his teacher verbatim, he may not understand what he has memorized. 44 Yet we cannot dismiss Apollodorus and Aristodemus as two people who “gehören zu jener leiderschaftlich anhänglichen aber unproduktiven und etwas lächerlichen Art von Schülern, die im Gefolge keines großen Mannes fehlt.” 45 Apollodorus and Aristodemus may have their faults, but they are not mere “groupies” of Socrates. They are, in fact, properly called philosophers. As Diotima observes, philosophers do not possess perfect knowledge, but pursue it. They stand between ignorance and knowledge, but strive for knowledge (204a1-b2). 46

Through Apollodorus and Aristodemus, Plato shows that Socrates’ Ascent to Beauty is no simple procedure with guaranteed results. As Diotima warns Socrates (210a1-2), not all people who hear the Ascent outlined are able to follow it. Even people intimately

43 Bury, xvi.
44 Rosen, 10-11.
45 Friedländer, 3:3.
46 Rosen, 14-15, observes that Apollodorus is an Eros-figure: neither a true philosopher nor one far removed from philosophy. But philosophers, according to Diotima, are Eros-figures (204a-b5). Although Diotima does not directly state whether there are different degrees among the δαίμονες, such a view would seem to accord well with her outline of the Ascent to Beauty and her distinction between lovers of the body and lovers of the soul. If there are δαίμονες on different levels, then Apollodorus would be a δαίμων of a lower degree than Socrates.
associated with philosophy may not attain this goal. If Apollodorus and Aristodemus, who knew the dialogue by heart, can err, casual readers of Plato are even more likely to err.\footnote{The curious phenomenon of pupils memorizing a dialogue and repeating it to other people appears in other dialogues: Euclides relates the \textit{Theaetetus} to Terpsion by having a slave read the dialogue he had heard from Socrates, transcribed, and then changed from a narrative to conversational form; Cephalus, the narrator of the \textit{Parmenides}, has also memorized Antiphon's account of that dialogue. Cf. also Phaedrus' memorization of Lysias' speech in the \textit{Phaedrus}. This phenomenon is not necessarily all bad. At least these men are paying attention to the words of Socrates, as Rosen, 11, remarks. But since it is people like Aristodemus and Apollodorus who are memorizing and repeating these dialogues, it is clear that mere reading of a dialogue cannot take the place of dialectic.} Furthermore, the casual reader cannot assume that he knows how to engage in dialectic merely because he has read some dialogues of Plato. After all, Apollodorus, too, engages in dialectic, but his method of dialectic does not contain the same nuanced irony that Socrates' does.\footnote{In the \textit{Apology} Socrates says that many young men saw him questioning their elders with the result that they were unable to answer him. The youths, pleased with the results, took up dialectic, not with a desire to find the truth, but to humiliate others (23c2-7). For this reason Plato in the \textit{Republic} (7.537c9-539d7) forbids people from studying dialectic until they are thirty years old and have had extensive preparatory training. Cf. Rosen, 11.} Through Apollodorus and Aristodemus, therefore, Plato demonstrates that neither mere recitation of a teacher's words nor unguided argument with friends leads to wisdom. Aristodemus and Apollodorus portray to the reader how philosophers too easily confuse Absolute Beauty with inferior forms of beauty. Although neither man is attracted to Socrates' body--the lowliest type of beauty...
in Diotima's scheme (210a4-7)—they do desire the wisdom of his soul. Thus, Aristodemus and Apollodorus are better philosophers/lovers than most of the guests at the symposium, who think about beauty in purely physical terms. Apollodorus, moreover, desires beautiful ideas (ἐπιτηδεύματα, μαθήματα and νόμοι in Diotima's scheme: 210c3-4; 211c5-6), which are certainly more noble than beautiful souls, but still are not Absolute Beauty. Thus, setting out in search of Absolute Beauty, even with the help of a good teacher (Socrates or the Platonic dialogue), does not guarantee success.

If the narrators of the dialogue are not perfect people to transmit the dialogue, their audience is no better. There are two audiences in the prologue to whom Apollodorus recounts the dialogue: Glaucon and some unnamed friends. The unnamed friends are the current audience; Glaucon was Apollodorus' audience two days earlier.

Who is this Glaucon? Presumably, he is the same Glaucon as in the *Parmenides* and the *Republic*, and so one of Plato's brothers. He is a follower of Socrates and is somewhat interested in philosophy, as his participation in the *Republic* and *Parmenides* and

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49Apollodorus' fondness for ideas is found in his statement of 173c2-5: "Apart from considering any practical benefits of philosophy, I really get excited, whenever I philosophize or hear others doing so."

50Friedländer, 3:3-4, concurs with this judgment. One cannot state with absolute certainty that the *Symposium*’s Glaucon is the same one as in the other two dialogues, but it is the most natural explanation.
his interest in the symposium indicate. He may be less informed concerning matters of culture. 51

Glaucon has several motives for hearing this dialogue. First, he is fond enough of philosophy and Socrates to want to hear any conversations he can. Glaucon, thus, does not deserve Apollodorus' insinuation that he is not a philosopher (173a2). But Glaucon does have another reason for inquiring into that dialogue, as his calling the dialogue the "symposium of Agathon, Socrates, and Alcibiades" reveals. By that phrase Glaucon reveals that he is interested in the political implications of the symposium and, more specifically, in the relationship between Alcibiades and Socrates. Although the reader of the Symposium knows that Alcibiades does not appear until late in the dialogue, Glaucon does not. He, therefore, overemphasizes the role Alcibiades plays in this dialogue. 52

Why is Glaucon so concerned about Alcibiades? In all likelihood, Glaucon sees the symposium as at least partly a political gathering--a natural assumption for Glaucon to make. Often symposia were occasions for the formation and strengthening of

51 Nussbaum, 168, argues that Glaucon is uninterested in philosophy and literature because he does not know that Agathon has left town and Aristodemus has been a pupil of Socrates for only three years. But Glaucon may not be quite so uninterested in those matters as Nussbaum thinks. Apollodorus asks, "Don't you know that Agathon has not lived here for many years and it has not yet been three years since I began spending time with Socrates?" The οὐκ in the question implies that Glaucon knows these facts, but in his excitement may have forgotten them.

52 Cf. Warner, 161.
political alliances. Glaucon would naturally be curious about what Alcibiades might have been doing at this symposium. Since Alcibiades espoused at different times oligarchy and democracy, fought for Athens, Sparta, and Persia, and was simultaneously loved and hated by Athens, any Athenian would naturally be curious about Alcibiades’ plans for the future. Glaucon may be even more concerned because he (mistakenly) believes that this symposium took place recently during the turmoil that followed the defeat of Athens.


54 Although he was thought to be pro-oligarchy in his younger days (Thucydides 6.60), he later was credited with bringing about the fall of the oligarchy of the Four Hundred (Thucydides 8.86).

55 Alcibiades claimed that he originally was fond of Sparta, but felt rebuffed when the Spartans made the treaty through the agency of Nicias, not himself. See Thucydides 5.43; 6.89.

56 Aristophanes, Frogs, 1425. See Thucydides’ overall evaluation of him in 6.15.

57 Nussbaum, 170, assumes that Glaucon is oligarchical in outlook and is interested in discovering if Alcibiades is plotting with the democrats against the Thirty. But there is little evidence with which to
Glauccon presumably believes that he may deduce Alcibiades’ plans, if he can determine how Socrates is influencing Alcibiades. Hence Glauccon is interested in the ἐρωτικοὶ λόγοι. Is Socrates’ truly Alcibiades’ lover? If so, will Socrates’ philosophy govern Alcibiades’ actions? Glauccon may hope to discover the answers by listening to their speeches on Eros and by hearing how the two interacted at the symposium.

Glauccon is a listener governed by both philosophical and political interests. The same combination of philosophical and non-philosophical interests exists in the other people who hear this dialogue, the unnamed friends of Apollodorus in the prologue. Like Glauccon, they love to dabble in philosophy even though they are businessmen (χρηματιστικοί, 173c6), not full-time followers of Socrates. They protest as much as Glauccon did, when Apollodorus claims that they are not serious enough about philosophy. Presumably they are interested in the dialogue because of the prospect of Alcibiades’ return to Athens during the crisis of 404 B.C. or because of his recent death; they, like Glauccon, want to know how

ascertain Glauccon’s politics. In Xenophon’s Memorabilia (3.6) his political program consists solely of a claim to be able to advise the government well. Nor does his kinship with Critias imply anything. Like his brother Plato, he may have been dissatisfied with the Thirty, even though his uncle Critias was the head of that government. His exact political affiliations, in any case, are somewhat irrelevant because politicians of all persuasions would be interested in knowing Alcibiades’ plans.

58If Alcibiades is still alive at this time, Apollodorus’ friends may be interested in the prospect of Alcibiades’ return. The narration must take place around 404 B.C., as we will see later (pages 77-77,,
Socrates may have influenced Alcibiades. Unlike Glaucon, however, they seem to have fewer misunderstandings about the nature and time of the symposium.\footnote{59}

Through these two audiences Plato rouses the interest of his readers. This symposium has been of great interest to many people: Aristodemus, Apollodorus, Phoenix, Glaucon and his friend and the friends of Apollodorus. The reasons for their interest—philosophical, theological, and political—may vary, but the dialogue speaks to all of them. Similarly, Plato’s readers may have different reasons for reading the dialogue, but the prologue nevertheless encourages them all to read it. Apollodorus’ statements challenge the readers to examine their motives for reading the dialogue (173a1-3, c2-d3): Are the readers serious philosophers or not? The presence of Glaucon and Apollodorus’ friends in the prologue shows that one need not be a full-time philosopher to derive benefit from the dialogue. All one must be is an Eros-like individual who yearns for wisdom. Indeed, Glaucon especially fn. 68). Whether this takes place before or after the news of Alcibiades’ assassination arrives in Athens is difficult to say.

\footnote{59}One other character mentioned in the dialogue who has heard and then passed on the dialogue is Phoenix. Rosen, 15, footnote 39, suggests that since the phoenix was thought to reproduce asexually, Phoenix represents “the possible rebirth of the Socratic circle through the instrumentality of the publication of the dialogue.” Rosen’s suggestion, however, is too fanciful. Perhaps Phoenix was better known to Plato’s contemporaries and his presence in the dialogue was meaningful to them. Unfortunately, to modern readers he has no significance; he is merely one more Athenian interested in Socrates, although not a member of his philosophical circle.
and Apollodorus’ friends prevent the philosophers (such as even Plato himself) from scaring off the reader.\textsuperscript{60}

Both the narrators and the audiences of the dialogue, then, portray how philosophy is done \textit{in concreto}. Although Socrates may expound on Absolute Beauty, the characters of the narrative frame reveal how difficult in practice it is to discern it. One can see beautiful bodies, but Absolute Beauty is beyond the power of the human eye. Even if one assents to the abstract nature of Absolute Beauty, the temptation to see Absolute Beauty as a beautiful idea or thought (\(\lambda\circ\gamma\circ\varsigma\) or \(\mu\alpha\theta\eta\mu\alpha\)) remains. Absolute Beauty, as Diotima warns us, may be beyond our comprehension (210a1-2) and Plato’s ability to teach us (210a3-4).

\textbf{The Setting of the Narrative Frame}

As we have seen, Plato demonstrates the working of Eros through the characters of the narrative frame. Through narrator and audience, the reader is invited to see how Eros works upon the reader, too. Yet Eros is seen at work not only in the characters of the prologue, but also in its setting. For Plato uses the contrast between the setting of the narration and the setting of the dialogue proper (i.e., the symposium) to underscore the effects of Eros.

\textsuperscript{60}G.-J. de Vries, “Apollodore dans le ‘banquet’ de Platon,” \textit{Revue des études grecques} 48 (1935): 65-69, argues with great insight that through the fanaticism of Apollodorus Plato intends to mock his own devotion to Socrates and philosophy: Plato recognizes that his obsession with philosophy makes him appear odd to his fellow citizens and, therefore, makes fun of himself through the character of Apollodorus.
To understand this, we must first pinpoint the two settings of the dialogue. The symposium is set in 416 B.C., on the second night after the close of the Lenaea, as the reference to Agathon's first victory makes clear (173a5-6).\textsuperscript{61} No such clue establishes the date of the dialogue's retelling by Apollodorus; that date, nonetheless, can be deduced from the data given in the dialogue. Apollodorus' retelling takes place long enough after the symposium for him to have grown from childhood and to have become a student of Socrates for three years.\textsuperscript{62} It also takes place several years after Agathon left Athens.\textsuperscript{63} By these criteria a date much earlier than 405 B.C. is unlikely. Nor can the retelling have occurred later than Socrates' death in 399 B.C. because Apollodorus implies that Socrates is still alive.\textsuperscript{64}

\\textsuperscript{61}The date of Agathon's first victory is given by Athenaeus 5.217a.

\textsuperscript{62}Apollodorus states that he was a child when the symposium occurred (173a5). This statement confirms his claim that this dialogue took place before he began studying with Socrates three years earlier (172c3-7). If Apollodorus were a young man of approximately twenty years at the time of the retelling and a child of ten years at the time of the dialogue, the retelling could take place anytime after 406 B.C.

\textsuperscript{63}The exact year of Agathon's departure is uncertain. Bury, lxvi, places his departure around 408 B.C. In any case he had long since left Athens when Aristophanes wrote his \textit{Frogs} in 405 B.C.

\textsuperscript{64}As Bury, lxvi, rightly notes, the present tense in the clause \textit{αφ'\ οὐ δ' ἐγὼ Σωκράτει συνδιατρίβω,} "since I have started spending time with Socrates," (172c5) indicates that Socrates is still alive.
Most scholars conclude from this evidence that the retelling of
the dialogue took place around 401 or 400 B.C. Bury, in particular,
argues for such a late date in order to ensure that there is plenty of
time for Apollodorus to grow up. But Glaucon's belief that "the
meeting of Agathon, Socrates, and Alcibiades" (172a7-b1) was
recent implies that the three are alive at the time of the dramatic
date of the first prologue or that Alcibiades, who was the first of the three to
die, had only recently died. The retelling, then, must take place in
404 or 403 B.C. Any later date would imply that Glaucon's chronology
concerning Alcibiades is all wrong, which is unlikely. Glaucon may
have had little interest in Agathon (172c3-4) and the inner circle of
Socrates (172c4-6), but if Glaucon followed politics at all, he must
have paid attention to Alcibiades' career.

65 Bury, lxvi. See also Guthrie, 4:366; Rosen, 7; Friedländer,
3:2, 432 n. 4. Cf. also Allen, 4 (who dates the prologue around 402
B.C.), and Mitchell, 4-5 (who states that the prologue must be
sometime before 400 B.C.).

37-39.

67 Glaucon seems to have been interested in politics at least at
one point in his life; see Xen. Mem. 3.6.

68 Nussbaum agrees with this date, but also attempts to
pinpoint the exact day: Apollodorus narrates the symposium to his
friends the day after Alcibiades' death is announced in Athens. She
argues that Glaucon is interested in the symposium because he
thinks that Alcibiades is still alive and has recently come back into
town, whereas the unnamed friends in the prologue are interested in
the dialogue because they have heard of the assassination of
Alcibiades. See Nussbaum, 168-170. Nussbaum's argument
The setting of the narration (404 or 403 B.C.) is in sharp contrast to the setting of the symposium (416 B.C.). The symposium was held when Athens was mightiest and all the characters were at the peaks of their careers, but was retold when the glory of Athens and of the symposiasts was all but gone. By late 404 B.C., the Athenians had been starved into surrendering to Sparta. Athens was beleaguered by enemies within and without: The Thirty ruled Athens tyrannically while a Spartan garrison occupied Attica. Alcibiades, a potential threat to this constitution, had been assassinated. Although opposition to the Thirty had arisen, the Thirty and their enemies were locked in stalemate.

The retelling of the dialogue took place, then, at the nadir of Athens’ power, while the symposium itself occurred at its zenith. The symposium occurred when philosophy was popular and the participants at the symposium were in political ascendancy. Apollodorus’ narration occurred when philosophy was unpopular, the symposium’s participants dead or disgraced, and the political ambitions of Alcibiades permanently ended. The contrast between suggests that the news of Alcibiades’ death reached Athens sometime in the two day interval between Apollodorus’ conversation with Glaucon and his talk with his unnamed friends. Although such a chronology is not impossible, a far simpler solution is to assume that both Glaucon and the unnamed friends ask about the symposium shortly after hearing the news of Alcibiades’ death. If Glaucon is oligarchically inclined (as Nussbaum argues and Glaucon’s kinship with Critias suggests), it may not be fear of Alcibiades that motivates his inquiry into the symposium, but his curiosity of what his teacher Socrates had to say to him shortly before his death.

69Cf. Hoffmann’s description of the anti-philosophical state of mind in Athens in 401-400 B.C., which mutatis mutandis is also apt for
the setting emphasizes how much philosophy depends upon the cultural milieu. The philosophers of 416 B.C. discuss Eros at a banquet with great flair and originality, while the philosophers of 404 B.C. can only repeat the words of 416 B.C. The philosophers of 416 B.C. are grandiose in their treatment of love, even as they live in the last of the Golden Age of Athens. No such creativity is possible in the midst of defeat and tyranny.  

This poverty of philosophy in the setting of the narration is due to the erotic nature of philosophers as outlined in Socrates' speech. On occasion, philosophers, like other daemonic creatures, may attain the beauty and truth they seek (203e2-5). More often than not, the turmoil of 404-403 B.C. Hoffmann, Über Platons Symposion (Heidelberg, 1947), 27. Of course, it is an over-simplification to say that the Athens of Socrates' last days were uniquely anti-philosophical, since Aristotle nearly suffered the same fate as Socrates a century later. Moreover, already in 423 B.C. Aristophanes' Clouds and Ameipsias' Connus had lampooned Socrates as a sophist. Yet though philosophy in general and Socrates in particular never received universal acclaim in Athens, 416 B.C. was by far a better year for Socrates than 404. Certainly, 416 B.C. was better than 404 B.C. for Eryximachus and Phaedrus, who had fled into exile the year after the symposium. By 404 B.C. Pausanias had disappeared from history and Agathon had left Athens. Only Aristophanes and Socrates remained in Athens, and Socrates was soon to die.

70 The seeming lack of inspiration that characterized Athens in 404 B.C. intensified in the fourth century B.C. The fourth century was keenly interested in the fifth century, as can be seen in the revival of fifth century tragedies and Athens' nostalgia for the pre-Peloponnesian War empire. A key piece of evidence for this nostalgia is Plato's dialogues, which are nearly all set in the fifth century, even though they were written in the fourth century. Mitchell, 5, finds it significant that the "Best-of-the-People" (Aristodemus) of 416 cannot offer a speech to the Athenians after their defeat in 404 B.C.
however, they do not possess it. So, too, the wretched, defeated Athens longed to hear the beautiful words of philosophers and poets spoken in a triumphal age. The Athenians themselves cannot produce wisdom any more than Eros himself possesses wisdom. Instead the Athenians must turn to older and wiser sources, even as Socrates consults Diotima.

Yet, as the prologue makes clear, seeking wisdom from older sources is not without its difficulties. Apollodorus may rightly see that he and his friends do not possess wisdom and cannot attain it by their own power (173d1-3), but Apollodorus does not even make the effort. Rather than venture out in search of wisdom, he repeats words of wisdom spoken twelve years earlier—or whatever he is able to remember of it. Consequently, Apollodorus does not find truths that may fill in the gaps left by the speakers of the symposium, but his account of the symposium disintegrates over time. The message of the symposium becomes garbled and has no lasting effect on his thought or behavior. Such is the effect of glorifying a past era and giving up on the present. Plato thereby warns his readers not to take the words of the late Socrates as the final answer to the questions under discussion, but to pursue the investigation further.71

The setting of the narrative frame, then, challenges the reader to evaluate the interplay between philosophy and external factors,

71Socrates, of course, continues to philosophize in this gloomy era. The *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo* are set when Athens is still suffering ill fortune and Socrates faces death. Even his death sentence cannot lessen Socrates’ attention to philosophy.
especially nostalgia. As the narrative frame demonstrates, nostalgia --especially nostalgia for a wiser era--can be an expression of Eros. For nostalgia is a recognition that the current era lacks something. Nostalgia attempts to reacquire what has been lost and to make it a permanent possession (cf. 200d8-10; 205a6-7). At the same time, nostalgia has hidden dangers. It may prevent an individual from engaging in philosophy and reduce him to citing past authorities. It may emphasize the lack found in the present situation rather than lead to any positive steps to fill the lack. Thus, nostalgia is daemonic: It may lead to wisdom or reduce one to perpetual ignorance.

Conclusion

When we began this chapter, we asked how the narrative frame fit in with the rest of the dialogue. In this chapter we have seen that the characters and setting of the narrative frame, as well as the process of narration, demonstrate the workings of Eros and, thus, are an integral part of the dialogue. The characters are “erotic,” i.e., philosophers. They love the beauty of speeches and noble ideas and long to possess them forever. The narrators desire to procreate in beauty and the audience wants to satisfy a longing. As erotic men, the characters of the narrative frame have as much right to be included in this dialogue about Eros as the guests at the symposium do. In fact, Apollodorus and Aristodemus are arguably better lovers in the Socratic sense than some of the guests assembled at the symposium, since they do not equate Eros with sex or physical desire.
Not only the characters but also the setting of the narrative frame is erotic. The setting of the narrative frame lacks the glory of the setting of the symposium (416 B.C.); nonetheless, the people who retell and listen to the retelling of the symposium long for this past golden age. In so doing, they exemplify in one more way how Eros operates. Eros is a lack longing to be fulfilled—not only the longing for sexual satisfaction, but also the longing to acquire wisdom and a stable political situation. Thus, the contrast between the setting of the symposium and that of the narrative frame underscores the universality of the longing associated with Eros and applies this truth to the political, cultural, and philosophical arenas.

The prologue, furthermore, demonstrates how the process of narration is related to philosophy. Both are manifestations of Eros who longs for and procreates in beauty. The physical beauty of Agathon inspires the guests at the symposium to procreate beautiful ideas, but the beauty of the ideas expressed at the symposium inspires the dialogue’s narration. Thus, the narration of philosophical dialogue is akin to philosophical discourse inspired by physical beauty. In light of the narrators of the Symposium, one can question whether the philosophical dialogue in Plato’s mind is as erotic as philosophical discourse, but one cannot deny the essential eroticism of narration. Narration, like philosophy, may fail, but its practitioners exhibit the erotic longing found in all men.

When we see these literary and philosophical connections with the rest of the dialogue, the first two Stephanus pages of the Symposium are no longer an obstacle to our thesis that the prologue
is organically connected to the entire dialogue, but rather a confirmation of our thesis. For in the narrative frame Plato has shown the power and limits of Eros as clearly as Socrates does in the body of the dialogue.
CHAPTER THREE
EROS OF BEAUTY AND THE GOOD: THE CHARACTERS AND DRAMA OF THE PROLOGUE

In the last chapter we saw that a seemingly unnecessary element in the prologue—Apollodorus’ narration of the dialogue—does bear significant relation to the rest of the dialogue. In fact, his narration demonstrates the “official” doctrine about Eros in action: All men strive to apprehend beauty and to procreate in beauty. Beauty exists in handsome bodies, but a nobler beauty can be found by pursuing truth and the good, especially by hearing such dialogues as the Symposium. Because mankind in general and philosophers in particular are daemonic beings, they rarely, if ever, arrive at Absolute Beauty and cannot permanently possess it. Thus, Apollodorus and his audience strive for Absolute Beauty, but encounter obstacles before they can attain their goal. By both their successes and their failures, Apollodorus and his friends demonstrate concretely what Socrates theorizes about Eros in the abstract. Since some readers may learn more by a story than by an abstract discussion, the prologue dramatizes the effects of Eros. Through their behavior, Apollodorus and company expound Socrates’ view of Eros as clearly as Socrates does in his speech.

We ought not, then, underestimate the importance of the characters and drama of the prologue. For if the seemingly most
unnecessary element of the prologue--the narration of Apollodorus--turns out to be integrally connected with the main theme of the dialogue, then the other elements of the prologue deserve to be analyzed in terms of the dialogue's philosophy. In this chapter, therefore, we will examine how the characters, drama, and words of the second half of the prologue (174b3-178a5) exemplify the dialogue's philosophy of Eros as process. Specifically, we will see how each guest's behavior in the prologue exemplifies his own portrayal of Eros while vindicating Socrates' explanation of Eros as the most comprehensive theory. Moreover, we will see that the ascent to Athens in the prologue illustrates the Ascent to Beauty outlined by Socrates in the body of the dialogue. Thus, even among the actions that are not at first glance erotic, Eros is at work.

Beauty as Defined by the Characters in the Prologue

As Socrates observes, each guest at the symposium believes that he is an expert on Eros (177d6-e2). Phaedrus and Eryximachus, by suggesting Eros as a subject for encomium, demonstrate confidence in their expertise. Pausanias, Agathon, and Aristophanes also claim expertise in this field, since drama is the province of Aphrodite and Dionysus (177d8-e2). Socrates himself claims that Eros is the only subject on which he is an expert (177d7-8). So many

1 The prologue of the Symposium can be divided into two parts: The first half, namely, Apollodorus' narration (172a1-174a2), and the second half, namely, Aristodemus' description of the setting of the symposium (174a3-178a5).
experts have assembled at the symposium that Socrates fears that the first speakers will say all that can be said about Eros, leaving no material for the later speakers (177e3-5).

The multitude of self-appointed experts on Eros validates Socrates' claim that all men are under Eros' sway (205a5-8; 206c1-2). As Socrates observes and all the guests prove, all people strive for the Beautiful (τὸ καλὸν) and the Good (τὸ ἀγαθὸν). Most of the guests are moved by the beauty of bodies: Pausanias loves Agathon, 

2In 204d3-205a4 Diotima outlines the ultimate goal: happiness that comes about by possession of the Good. F.C. White, "Love and Beauty in Plato's Symposium," Journal of Hellenic Studies 109 (1989): 149-157, has questioned, however, whether Diotima means to identify the Good with the Beautiful; he argues that Diotima substitutes the Good for the Beautiful, so that Socrates can better answer her question why people seek Beauty, but does not equate the two. Similarly, Soble argues that beauty is an instrumental, not an intrinsic goal; see Alan Soble, "Love is not Beautiful: Symposium 200e-201c," Apeiron 19 (1985), 43. Mitchell, 130-132, also raises the question of the relationship between Good and Beauty.

There are good reasons, however, to assume that Beauty and the Good, while not identical, ought not to be separated. The ancient Greeks associated the two with one another; the ideal was to be καλὸς καγαθὸς. Plato himself underscores this association when he calls Agathon καλὸν (174a9), while emphasizing the etymology of Agathon's name (174b4); thus, in Agathon he associates Beauty with the Good. Moreover, as Allen, 54, observes, Socrates links Good with Beauty in 201c, where "lack of beautiful things implies lack of good things." Moreover, if we separate the two, we run into difficulties. As Anderson, 82, notes, if Good is a higher value than Beauty, the Ascent should have the Good, not Absolute Beauty, as its goal. If Beauty and the Good are disassociated in 204d3-205a4, the question of why men desire Beauty is never answered. Perhaps it is best to say with Allen, 45, that "beauty is the sensuous aspect of goodness, what is good to look at or good to hear, and, by an easy extension, goodness in thought or discourse."
Eryximachus loves Phaedrus, and Socrates cannot keep his hands off handsome young men (213c3-5; 216d2-3). The beauty of words also moves a number of the guests--Phaedrus, Pausanias, Aristophanes, Agathon, and even Socrates. Nor is it words in general that impress them, but rather the tales of the deeds of Eros (as expressed through Dionysus and Aphrodite--177e1-3). The guests are lovers of Beauty, indeed.

Since, however, each guest has a different understanding of what Beauty is, not all of these "experts" agree about Eros and its goal. Although each guest builds on the speeches of his predecessors, some of the guests openly criticize previous speakers. This difference among the guests, however, is not surprising, as Diotima's description of the Ascent to Beauty demonstrates: There are several possible objects of beauty, some nobler, some less so. All who pursue beauty of any kind are to be


4Pausanias criticizes Phaedrus for assuming there is only one Eros (180c4-d1); Agathon criticizes Phaedrus for saying that Eros is an ancient deity (195a8); and Socrates refutes a point made by Aristophanes (205d10-206a1) and Agathon's entire argument (199c3-201c9).

5Nehemas rightly observes that it is the Ascent to Beauty that radically differentiates Socrates' speech from the others. The rest of his speech is typical for an encomium, but when Diotima speaking
counted lovers, whether or not they pursue beautiful bodies. Their contemporaries may not apply the label of ἐραστής to them because the semantic field of ἔρως and ἐραστής has been narrowed to exclude certain forms of desire (especially the "higher," more abstract forms of Eros or desire). Nonetheless, lovers of all objects of beauty, Socrates avers, deserve the name ἐραστής, "lover."6

Not surprisingly, each expert maintains a view about Eros and Beauty that accords well with his lifestyle. It is appropriate, therefore, to examine how Plato characterizes each of the guests in the prologue, in order to determine how each guest’s claim to expertise is influenced by his own personality. We must examine for what object of desire each guest seeks, and we must ask how Plato evaluates those objects, even as we examined in the last chapter the implicit theories of Eros that govern the behavior of Apollodorus and Aristodemus.7

through Socrates comes to the Ascent, she states that all that preceded was preliminary to the real knowledge of Eros. See Plato, Symposium, tr. Alexander Nehemas and Paul Woodruff, with an introduction by Alexander Nehemas (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989), xx-xxi. Thus, it is appropriate for us to keep the Ascent to Beauty foremost in our mind, as we examine the characters of the prologue and, later, the physical ascent mentioned in the prologue.

6Socrates cites ποίησις, "poetry," as a parallel example (205a9-d8). Originally, it meant any "creation" or "production", but it has come to refer to only a limited range of artistic creations. LSJ, 1429.

7In examining the characters we will avoid type-casting the speakers as representatives of different professions or schools of philosophy, as Plochmann, 34, 38, criticizes Rosen for doing.
Before looking at Plato's depiction of the guests, however, we ought to note that Plato is selective in introducing the characters of the prologue. Plato does not have all the guests who were supposedly at this banquet speak in the prologue, but only the most notable lovers--those who gave the most memorable speeches in honor of Eros (178a1-3). Thus, only those guests whose speeches are narrated by Aristodemus have a speaking part in the prologue. The guests who sit between Phaedrus and Pausanias (180c1-2) are silent not only in the body of the dialogue, but also in the prologue, so that Plato may introduce the erotic character of those individuals who best portray Eros. It is as if only those who give noteworthy encomia of Eros are worthy of having their behavior portrayed in the prologue.

(Compare the typecasting done by Edmund L. Erde, "Comedy and Tragedy and Philosophy in the Symposium: An Ethical Vision," *Southwest Journal of Philosophy* 7 (1976), 161-167, who discusses Aristophanes and Agathon exclusively as representatives of their profession.) Instead, we will focus on the objects of their desire and will endeavor to draw a well rounded picture of the individuals. In particular, we will take to hear Gallagher's remarks concerning the dialectical nature of the characters. See Gallagher, 40-42.

Moreover, it ought to be clear that there are several fruitful ways in which the relationship between the speakers and the order of their speeches can be analyzed. See Bury, lli-livi; Duncan, 277-288; Miller, 19-25. The intent of the scheme proposed in this chapter is not so much to deny the legitimacy of opposing arrangements of the speakers as to analyze the speakers in terms of Socrates' speech.

8Plato does mention in the prologue, in addition to the guests, some servants: the cooks (175b5-c1) and the servant who greeted Aristodemus (174e2; 175a3, 6). One other servant speaks briefly, after having discovered Socrates on the neighbor's porch (175a7-9). These individuals are the only exceptions to the rule stated above.
The 'Ερασταί of Pleasure: Pausanias and Aristophanes

In modern parlance "Platonic love" means a love that finds no physical expression. This definition at first glance seems not entirely unjustified, since Diotima in the Ascent to Beauty prefers an abstract, incorporeal Beauty to the beauty found in human bodies. Diotima, however, never denies a proper place for physical beauty in her scheme. In fact, she recognizes desire for beautiful bodies as a legitimate form of Eros (206b7-c5; 210a5-b6). Furthermore, she maintains that love of physical beauty is a prerequisite for the desire for Absolute Beauty. Before a lover can progress to higher objects of love, he must pursue beautiful bodies (τὰ καλὰ σώματα, 210a6). Even promiscuity, the love of many beautiful bodies, has a proper, albeit limited, place in the Ascent to Beauty: It teaches a young man to discover beauty as a universal phenomenon.

Thus, the love of physical beauty is truly called Eros and gratifying oneself with physical beauty is not necessarily wrong. Although not the highest possible expression of Eros, it is a form of it. Yet there are a number of dangers associated with this type of Eros: Because of its emphasis on physical beauty, the love equated with sex can be reduced to one of several sensual pleasures. From this

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9 The Oxford English Dictionary, 2d ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), s.v. 'Platonic,' 11:1006: "2a. Applied to love or affection for one of the opposite sex of a purely spiritual character, and free from sensual desire. Also of affection for one of the same sex."
perspective, Eros is synonymous with wine and sex (Dionysus and Aphrodite), as Socrates intimates (177d7-e3).  

Two guests are present whose speeches emphasize the physical side of Eros: Pausanias and Aristophanes. Although in their speeches they touch on other purposes of desire--including its social value (Pausanias) and its psychological and theological implications (Aristophanes)--they see Eros as primarily love of the body. For Pausanias, the question is ultimately whether or not a

10Anderson, 11, observes that in effect Dionysus has already passed judgment on them (as Agathon had requested)--and the judgment is not favorable.

11To an extent Phaedrus and Agathon assume that the goal of Eros is sex. Yet by the showmanship of their speeches, they demonstrate that a true ἔραστής is as concerned with the beauty of words as with the beauty of bodies. See the discussion on pages 99-101.

Duncan, 277-286, has set up a different paradigm of the speeches. According to him, Phaedrus and Eryximachus emphasize the human (“horizontal”) aspects of love, while Pausanias and Agathon emphasize its virtuous (“vertical”) aspects. Aristophanes modifies the arguments of Phaedrus and Eryximachus to make a more cogent system of the “horizontal” view, while Socrates develops Pausanias’ and Eryximachus’ “vertical” view, purging it of sophistic errors. In Duncan’s scheme, Aristophanes’ speech counterbalances Socrates’.

Duncan’s division of the speakers into those influenced by the naturalistic school of Hippias (Phaedrus and Eryximachus) and those influenced by the ethically and rhetorically minded school of Prodicus (Pausanias and Agathon) is insightful, but ignores some facts. Though Eryximachus may believe in “reciprocity” among lovers, his speech does not allude to sex, but has made it an abstract endeavor. In contrast, despite Pausanias’ evaluation of Eros in ethical terms, his idea of gratification is more earthy than that of the allegedly “horizontalist” Eryximachus.
beloved ought to gratify (χαρίζεσθαι) his lover. Although the beloved must attempt to improve himself morally by his choice of lover (184a5-b3; 185a5-b5), the lover himself learns nothing in the experience but merely has his sexual urges gratified.

Similarly, Aristophanes views Eros primarily as the joining of two halves. Although such a joining ameliorates man's psychological state and makes his punishment from the gods easier to bear, Aristophanes does not envision a higher goal than intercourse (191b5-c8). To be sure, Aristophanes' speech is not without

12Mitchell, 42, rightly notes that in the end Pausanias forgets his distinction between uranian and pandemic love; moreover, he makes the beloved, not the lover, responsible for distinguishing between the two types of love, since the lover is too blinded by love to make the distinction. See Bury, xxi, for a similar judgment: “The nakedness of this proposition is cloked [sic] by the device of distinguishing between a noble and a base Eros, and by the addition of the saving clause ἀρετῆς ἑνέκα. Nonetheless, it would seem that the speaker's main interest is in χαρίζεσθαι, rather than in accruing ἀρετή, and that fundamentally he is a sensualist....” In this light, it is significant that we know absolutely nothing about Pausanias except his love affair with Agathon. See Allen, 14; Mitchell, 29.

13Finding a lover who will improve the beloved morally is difficult, as Alcibiades' speech demonstrates. Thus, Wolz, 329, notes that although Alcibiades searched for a lover who would improve him morally and intellectually, Socrates declined to be that lover, since he could not communicate his wisdom to Alcibiades.

14Warner, 169, criticizes Pausanias also for not explaining the commonality between base and noble love and for not integrating physical love (sex) with other aspects of desire.

15Dover argues that Plato intended Aristophanes' speech as a parody of Aristophanes, much as Aristophanes' Clouds parodied
philosophical merit. As Duncan observes, Aristophanes presents the clearest argument of the "horizontal" notion of love, since he "purifies the horizontal view of love of its materialism, Hippias' materialism," since the Hippian school (represented by Phaedrus and Eryximachus) "tends to reduce the human to the non-human." Duncan also observes that contra Socrates the striving for the "vertical" is what got mankind in trouble in the first place. Moreover, as Hani observes, his discussion of an androgynous sex is not entirely his own comic creation, but draws from earlier Greek mythology--from Hesiod's Chaos to the god Hermaphroditus of the fourth century B.C.--as attested to in text and art (e.g., the Stockholm Hermaphroditus and Berlin Hermaphroditus). Furthermore, Aristophanes uses the myth of original androgynous beings to describe the origin of Eros, not of humanity. Hani argues that by describing how Eros' existence is due to human weakness that longs for something greater than mere self, Aristophanes is not far from

Socrates. Plato had Aristophanes draw on elements from folklore (e.g., the etiologic myth cast in an Aesopic style), so that Aristophanes' speech would differ from all the rest in emphasizing the individual over the abstract. Since Plato believed that "the individual, the particular, and the familiar"--the stock of comedy--were antithetical to the pursuit of philosophy, he sets up this contrast between Aristophanes and the other speakers. See K.J. Dover, "Aristophanes' Speech in Plato's Symposium," (hereafter, Dover, "Aristophanes") Journal of Hellenic Studies 86 (1966) 41-50. Cf. K.J. Dover, Symposium, 113.

16Duncan, 283-284.
Diotima’s position, viz., that Eros exists because humans strive for immortality.17

Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that Aristophanes emphasizes primarily the physical aspect of Eros. Although the welding together that a couple desires involves more than sex,18 the union of lover and beloved is expressed solely in physical terms in Aristophanes’ speech.

By not discussing the moral implications of Eros for the lover, Pausanias and Aristophanes differ markedly from Diotima. Her Ascent to Beauty is chiefly concerned with the moral education of the lover, not the beloved.19 The Ascent is described primarily from the lover’s point of view, not from that of the beloved: The lover, not the beloved, progresses through the various stages of seeking beauty. To the extent that any of her theory about the Ascent applies to the


18Cf. Anderson, 44.

19As Nehemas, xix, observes, the ancient Greeks presumed that the lover possessed wisdom which he then imparted to the beloved. Socrates, however, “has turned the lover from a purveyor into a pursuer of wisdom.” Similarly, Phaedrus alludes to the power of Eros to improve not only the behavior of the young, impressionable beloveds, but also that of their lovers. Since lovers would not want their beloveds to see them in a bad light, lovers are inspired to act more courageously than if they were merely fighting before their peers (178d4-e1). Thus, an army of lovers and beloveds (178e3-179a2) would not only train the beloveds in heroic action, but would incite the lovers to uphold the heroic code themselves.
beloved, it is that the search for Beauty can be undertaken as a lover (τὸ ὀρθῶς ἐπὶ τὰ ἐρωτικὰ ἱέναι, 211b7-c1) or as a beloved (ἡ ὑπ’ ἄλλου ἄγεσθαι, 211c1). In all of this Diotima differs from Pausanias who is ultimately unconcerned about the moral formation of the lover, and Aristophanes, for whom Eros provides relief, not education.

Aristophanes’ and Pausanias’ views about Eros are determined in large part by who they are. Aristophanes, who cudgeled his opponents with sexual lampoon in his comedies, recognized, as did the comedians before him, that men are often made vulnerable by sex. To charge that a man is effeminate can be more effective in humiliating an opponent than bringing charges of political misconduct.20 One would expect, therefore, that Aristophanes would emphasize the fragility of the human condition in his encomium of Eros. Pausanias, in contrast, equates Eros with sex because of his

20 Kaibel notes in PW s.v. Aristophanes (13:985): Der Komödiendichter jener Zeit war ein privilegierter Censor nicht nur des öffentlichen Lebens, sondern auch des privaten, soweit es in der Öffentlichkeit erkennbar wurde. Er war an sich ein einzelner Privatmann, aber sobald er, vom Staate gewissermassen im Auftrage des Gottes bestellt, die Bühne des Staates betrat, war er der Vertreter eines durch den Schutz der Religion geheiligten Princips. Alles, was Anstoss gab, fiel seiner Kritik zu, das μέμφεσθαι, das Aufdecken einer νόσος, und, wenigstens idell, auch die Heilung derselben war sein Element: was tadellos schien, ging ihn nichts an.

Erde, 165, adds that “comedy denies the cosmic order and suggests paying any price to get along”--as Socrates refuses to do in the Apology. Thus, it is “cruel jesting at the expense of humanity.” Hence Socrates’ rebuttal of comedy in 223d3-6. Erde perhaps overstates the case, but one cannot deny the comedian’s interest in sexuality as a means to exploit his opponents’ weaknesses.
own vices. As Gallagher has observed, Pausanias desires to be taken seriously as a philosopher, but is addicted to vice. Although he wishes to treat the topic in all philosophical earnest, his personality dictates that he attempt to modify existing νόμοι concerning erotic desire to suit his own purposes. Pausanias distinguishes between base and noble love—a philosophical advancement over Phaedrus' presentation—but in the end says that anything done in the name of love is justifiable, if only the lover or beloved claims to have a noble goal.21 Thus, Pausanias appears in the end to be a scoundrel cloaking his vice with virtue.22

Not surprisingly, then, Pausanias and Aristophanes are portrayed in the prologue as revelers in sensual pleasures. They, along with Agathon, have overindulged themselves in alcohol the previous night. In fact, the only time Pausanias and Aristophanes speak in the prologue is to complain about their hangovers (176a5-b4). Pausanias complains that he is really (τὸ ὅντι) in a very (πῶνυ) bad way and needs a rest before (presumably) overindulging in wine

21Gallagher, 40, 52; see also Rosen, 88; Bury, xxvi. Nola, 68-72, argues for a more positive interpretation of Pausanias' speech, but without the counterbalancing of philosophy and vice that Gallagher sees in Pausanias. To the degree that Nola does not take the vice-ridden nature of Pausanias into consideration, his interpretation of Pausanias' speech is flawed.

22As Rosen, 63, puts it: "Pausanias, however, is seriously concerned with neither logic nor morality. He is engaged in an intricate and sophistic attempt to secure his own erotic advantage." For an analysis of the sophistic style of Pausanias, see Bury, xxvii-xxviii.
again (176a6-8). Aristophanes numbers himself among the \( \beta\varepsilon\beta\alpha\pi\tau\iota\sigma\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\) (176b4); like Pausanias, he eagerly seeks relief from drinking that night in whatever way he can (\( \pi\alpha\nu\tau\iota \tau\rho\omicron\pi\omicron\phi\), 176b3).23

Judged by the criterion of drunkenness, Agathon would have to be numbered among the lovers of sensual pleasure. After all, Agathon professes that he is not strong enough to survive another round of drinking (176b8). Agathon, however, does not belong among the lovers of mere sensual beauty, since other, nobler aspects of his character are revealed in the prologue, as we will see. What marks Pausanias and Aristophanes in the prologue as lovers of a particularly base beauty is that they speak only of their over-indulgence in wine the previous night.

The prologue, then, introduces Pausanias and Aristophanes as the lowest form of the sophist and poet, respectively. The base Pausanias finds a more noble counterpart in Eryximachus; while Pausanias complains in the prologue about his hangovers, Eryximachus proposes an intellectual exercise. Similarly, Phaedrus and Agathon are better representatives of poetry and rhetoric than Aristophanes. Phaedrus, by his intellectual interest in Eros and encomia, is ultimately the person responsible for the symposium’s

\[23\text{As Hani, 89, notes: “La bouffonnerie dans l’exposé du mythe est en harmonie avec l’attitude de son ‘auteur’. C’est sous les traits d’un ivrogne qu’il se présente lui-même, en disant qu’il est un de ceux qui, la veille, ont bu le plus copieusement καὶ γὰρ αὐτὸς εἶμι τῶν χθές βεβαπτισμένων 176 B, ce qui l’afflige, au milieu des discours sérieux sur l’amour, d’un hoquet rebelle dont il ne vient à bout qu’en se chatouillant les narines (189 A).”} \]
choice of topic. Agathon is as much concerned with great ideas (175c7-d2) as he is with adulation and wine. Thus, the prologue establishes a hierarchy among the guests. Phaedrus, Eryximachus, and even Agathon are greater than Pausanias and Aristophanes. Although all of the other guests may have speeches inferior to that of Socrates, they are not all equal to one another.

The prologue is Plato’s evaluation of the lovers of sensual Beauty and sensual pleasure, demonstrating the folly of equating Eros exclusively with the desire for physical Beauty. Those who pursue base pleasure will find the consequences unpleasant, as the overindulgent Aristophanes and Pausanias discover. Nonetheless, the prologue reveals that the two are true lovers, even as all men are. Even if their view of Eros is a baser one than that held by Socrates, they are still under Eros’ sway. Aristophanes and Pausanias are concerned solely with Dionysus and Aphrodite, which makes Socrates attribute to them the title ἐπαθητοῖ (177e1-2).

24 This does not imply that Phaedrus’ and Agathon’s speeches succeed in their attempt to speak more intelligently about Eros. Agathon’s speech, after all, turns out to be filled more with Gorgianic rhetoric than serious content, as Socrates’ interrogation of him reveals. Nonetheless, Phaedrus and Agathon are more concerned with the abstract side of Eros than Pausanias and Aristophanes are.

25 The customary interpretation of the dialogue is that Socrates’ speech is the climax of the dialogue. See, for example, Krischer, 51-53. As we have seen (pages 59-61), this point is well taken, so long as we understand that Socrates’ speech is not the whole dialogue or the philosophically perfect description of Eros. By their natures, Eros and Absolute Beauty cannot be explained perfectly.
Not all the guests, however, view Eros solely as the desire for beautiful bodies or pleasure. Most of the guests, in fact, use the term Eros to denote any intense longing, including the longings for nonsensual beauty. Socrates, of course, prefers a non-sensual beauty, or rather a sensual beauty that leads to a transcendent Beauty. In Diotima’s scheme, as outlined by Socrates, Eros leads ultimately to an incorporeal Absolute Beauty. In between sensual beauty and Absolute Beauty, however, there are several objects of beauty: souls (ψυχαί, 210b7), intellectual pursuits (ἐπιτηδεύματα, 210c3), laws (νόμοι, 210c4), pieces of knowledge (ἐπιστήμαι, 210c6), and the thought of beauty (ἐπιστήμην μίαν τοιαύτην, ἢ ἐστιν καλοῦ τοιούτε, 210d7-e1). These objects of beauty vary in scope, but are all in some sense abstract or incorporeal. While none of them—including the thought of beauty—is Absolute Beauty, the desire for these objects is a nobler manifestation of Eros than desire for the body is.

Although all the guests aver that Eros involves more than sex, only three guests besides Socrates emphasize a non-physical beauty and its Eros: Phaedrus, Eryximachus, and Agathon. At first glance, Pausanias and Aristophanes seem worthy to be on the list, since Pausanias was a pupil of Prodicus, and Aristophanes was a comic poet well known for his treatment of contemporary intellectual debates. Yet Pausanias and Aristophanes differ greatly from the other guests in the emphasis that they put on sex. As we saw in the last section, Pausanias and Aristophanes view copulation as the
ultimate goal of Eros. In contrast, Phaedrus and Agathon are more rhetorical in their analysis of Eros, while Eryximachus avoids entirely any discussion of intercourse in his description of Eros.

To some degree, these three guests emphasize beauty because of their situation in life. Eryximachus is a physician, whose profession demands that he treat the human body in a detached manner.26 Thus, he treats sexual attraction as merely one of several drives in man. Sexual attraction becomes merely a paradigm for all forces of attraction; Eros then becomes a cosmic, not a bodily, force. Agathon and Phaedrus, meanwhile, are afforded a unique perspective on Eros because they are ἐρωμένοι (beloveds). Since they cannot, properly speaking, love their lovers, they must find a different object of desire.27 Thus, they more than their lovers turn to

26Allen notes, 30, that Eryximachus practiced a profession that was remarkably advanced by modern standards—a profession of which he was rightfully proud. Anderson, 11, adds that as a physician Eryximachus would fall under the aegis of Apollo, the rival of Dionysus (and hence Eros, since for Anderson Eros is a mask worn by Dionysus). Although Anderson puts more emphasis on the tension between the Apollonian and Dionysian in the dialogue, thus betraying his interest in Nietzsche, it is fitting to distinguish the more orderly concept of Eros held by Eryximachus from that held by Pausanias and Aristophanes.

27As Warner, 165, notes, Phaedrus' speech does not indicate "first-hand experience of love," since he looks at it through the eyes of a beloved. Not surprisingly, then, Phaedrus praises the effects of the love relationship more than the relationship itself, as Anderson, 24-26, observes; moreover, to the extent that Phaedrus praises the beloved, he is praising himself. With his emphasis on the beloved, Phaedrus nearly arrives at a reciprocal relationship of love, although
incorporeal beauty and express their desire in a non-physical or abstract way. Primarily, their Eros has as its object beautiful words—especially the words about Eros. Phaedrus' constant desire is to praise Eros in an encomium (177a5-b1), while Agathon speaks "beautifully" (καλῶς; 201c1) about Eros, employing every Gorgianic device he can muster in his peroration (197c1-e5). Because they long to have the command of beautiful words, their speeches are not only about Eros but are themselves expressions of Eros, ἔρωτικοι λόγοι (172b2).28

The interest of these three guests in incorporeal beauty is manifest already in the prologue. Nowhere is this more easily seen than in the case of Phaedrus. The prologue demonstrates that Phaedrus is essentially a man of books and learning,29 an aspect of his personality that would not be manifest, if one judged solely by the content of his speech. In his speech Phaedrus praises Eros' effect on Achilles (179e1-180a4) and Alcestis (179b5-d2) and treats the bard Orpheus with contempt (179d2-7). Nonetheless, the prologue reveals that Phaedrus is more akin to the Orpheus he despises than

28As Allen, 8-11, notes, the main characters (except for Aristophanes) were present also at the Protagoras, which is essentially concerned with the value of sophistic education; hence the emphasis some of the guests in the Symposium place on rhetoric.

29Rosen, 40-44, has traced the influence of the polymath Hippias on Phaedrus. This judgment is drawn from the Protagoras. See PW s.v. Phaedrus (38:1556).
to a Homeric hero like Achilles. Phaedrus is a talker and reader, not a doer. He has read a number of books containing encomia and is well aware of the sophists’ habit of praising trivial items (177b5-c1). He is familiar with the sophist Prodicus (177b4). In the speech of his narrated by Eryximachus in the prologue, he demonstrates a fascination with rhetoric (177a5-c4): He employs alliteration of π’s with assonance of omegas (παίκωνας εἶναι ὑπὸ τῶν ποιητῶν, 177a7), then alliteration of τ’s (τηλικοῦτῶν ὄντι καὶ τοσοῦτος θεῶ, 177a8), as well as polyptoton (ποιητῶν ποιημένους, 177a7; ποιητῶν πεποιηκέναι, 177b1).30

Since the prologue shows a different--a literary--side to Phaedrus, it offers the reader a different perspective from which to interpret Phaedrus’ speech. By portraying Phaedrus as a man fond of reading and making fine speeches, the prologue alerts the reader to focus as much attention on the rhetorical style of the speech as on its contents.31 Indeed, from the prologue’s characterization of Phaedrus, the reader ought to expect to see his theory of Eros not so much in his explicit statements about Eros but in his use of fine oratory on behalf of Eros.

30To some degree, Phaedrus shows the same rhetorical flair in his speech in the body of the dialogue. As Bury, xxv-xxvi, observes, the speech of Phaedrus is filled with mythological allusions, chiasms, paronomasia, special compound verbs, and anacolutha.

31Interestingly, Phaedrus is a man of the same character in the dialogue named for him. His chief preoccupation in that dialogue, as well as that of the Phaedrus, is not so much Eros, but speeches about Eros.
The prologue likewise prepares the reader to expect Agathon to be a man who will honor Eros not so much by expounding well thought out theories about him, but by crafting a speech full of beautiful words, thereby revealing the power of Eros. To be sure, the name Agathon evokes in the reader, whether modern or ancient, the image of a man more concerned about style than substance. The modern reader is likely to think of Aristophanes' characterization of him in the *Thesmophoriazusae* as an effete poet. Plato's contemporaries would have had a somewhat similar image of Agathon, which would have reinforced by first-hand acquaintance with his plays.

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32 See especially lines 39-265. Cf. Socrates' comment in the *Symposium* (194b1), where he states that Agathon's manliness (ἀνδρείαν) in the theater surprised him and makes him fearful that he will be unable to give a speech after Agathon. From these sources we learn of Agathon's effeminate appearance. From *Prt.* 315d and *Symp.* 193b6-7 and Xen. *Symp.* 8.32 we learn that he was the beloved of Pausanias. Cf. *PW*, s.v. Agathon 1:761.

Apparently, he earned some respect as a playwright: The character Dionysus in Aristophanes' *Frogs* (84) calls him a good poet (ἀγαθός ποιητής), much missed by his friends. To be sure, Aristophanes alludes to Agathon so that he can make a pun on his name (Ἀγάθων is ἀγαθός). Yet Aristophanes' treatment of him in the *Thesmophoriazusae* implies that he was noteworthy enough to be the butt of Aristophanes' satire. The judgment of antiquity was that his style was καλλιέρπης (Aristophanes, *Thesm.* 49, 60). Moreover, he was known as an innovator of plots; see Mitchell, 91. The only source for the particulars of his style is Plato, who portrays him as heavily influenced by Prodicus (*Prt.* 315d) and Gorgias (*Symposium* 198c). For an analysis of his style, see Bury, xxv-xxvi.
The prologue portrays to some degree those unflattering qualities often ascribed to him. He is a dashing young man, whose handsomeness demands that even the ugly and habitually dirty Socrates must attempt to pretty himself. He is a man who overindulges himself in the manner of Pausanias and Aristophanes (176a-b). And he derives his self-worth from the acclaim of crowds; he has spent one night indulging with the ὄξιλος (174a7) and intends to spend another being fawned over by learned men. Because of his love for acclamation, he presents himself as a liberal master who is loved and respected by his slaves (175b5-c1). For the same reason, he is impatient with Socrates' tardiness (175a10-11, c3-4), since it makes Socrates, not him, the object of attention.

Nonetheless, a positive picture of Agathon also emerges in the prologue. Agathon is a serious enough poet to be able to invite a number of intellectuals to an intimate party. Agathon desires to know the thoughts of Socrates, since Agathon is as interested in acquiring

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33 The people of Athens may have respected Agathon more than we are inclined to believe. The evidence from comedy (primarily from Ar. Thesm.) is naturally hostile to Agathon, since comedy must make sport of contemporary figures. To conclude on the basis of Aristophanes' portrayal of Agathon that Agathon was not a talented tragedian or was largely detested by his contemporaries is to go beyond the evidence. Although it is likely that Agathon, like Euripides a few years later, withdrew to Macedonia because he felt unappreciated at Athens, we cannot be certain this is the case. Aristophanes gives no reason for Agathon's departure (Ran. 83-85), but simply states the fact. Furthermore, Agathon did have some success in Athens: He won first place in 416 B.C. Like Euripides, he may not have been popular enough always to win first place, but he was often granted a right to be one of the three tragedians to offer his plays.
greater knowledge as he is in indulging himself at a party. Even Aristodemus, a devotee of Socrates, calls Agathon a σοφός ἀνήρ (174c7) and is glad to finagle an invitation to his party. In fact, Aristodemus doubts that he would be a fit guest for Agathon. Aristodemus calls himself φαῦλος when compared with the wise Agathon (174c7). Socrates, of course, makes similar comments about Agathon: Socrates’ thoughts are trivial when compared to the dignified wisdom that impressed over thirty thousand people; Socrates’ wisdom is dream-like, while Agathon’s is brilliant; Socrates wishes he could obtain the wisdom of Agathon through osmosis; Socrates is an empty vessel that needs filling with Agathon’s wisdom (175d3-e7).

Of course, these statements praising Agathon’s wisdom are full of irony. Yet the irony in these statements does not negate the fact that Agathon is viewed by his contemporaries and by himself to be a learned man, indeed, an intellectual celebrity. Agathon recognizes the irony in Socrates’ flattery and chides Socrates for treating him insolently. Agathon will not tolerate Socrates questioning his wisdom or talents; Agathon expects that he will defeat Socrates outright in a battle of wits to be conducted later that evening (175e7-9). Thus, the irony in Socrates’ remarks only underscores Agathon’s esteemed status among his peers.

Even Socrates--however ironic he intends his words to be--recognizes Agathon’s stature as an intellectual. In fact, the irony in his words actually supports Agathon’s standing. Ironic flattery would not
be effective if there were no basis for that flattery. Socrates must recognize some intellectual capacity in Agathon—overestimated though it may be by most Athenians—if Socrates is to deprecate it. Far from assuming that Socrates' interlocutors are dunces, the irony used by the character Socrates throughout Plato's dialogues assumes that the interlocutors Socrates encounters are the most knowledgeable in their fields. The highest dramatic effect is achieved when an uneducated, self-professed ignoramus upstages all the experts.

The ironic praise of Agathon, then, is in line with the character Socrates' treatment of his interlocutors in Plato's earlier dialogues. As Plato has Socrates explain in the *Apology* (21b-23c), Socrates always searches for those whom he believes to be experts in their fields. After conversing with them, he always discovers that the experts are never able to prove fully the tenets of their science or art. Nor can they give an adequate definition of one of the most elementary objects in their profession. Accordingly, the reader of Plato's dialogues may come to believe that Socrates is wholly insincere in his flattery of the abilities of his interlocutors: Socrates already knows more than his interlocutors and uses them as foils to demonstrate his superior wisdom.34 Such a conclusion, however, is unwarranted. In his search for wisdom, Socrates looks only to those people who are likely to be able to help him, since he cannot produce any ideas of his

34For example, *Ap.* 21c-23b; *Meno* 80a-b.
own. His process of ελεγχος can only test and refine ideas, not produce them. Hence without the beauty of some other noble soul, he cannot beget any ideas of his own (Theaetetus 149a-151d), since he--an Eros-like δομων--does not possess in himself the beauty that could generate such ideas. The problem is that no other person can beget truly beautiful ideas. In the end, Socrates is shown to have greater knowledge because he is aware of his ignorance, while the self-professed experts are shown to have no knowledge. Hence Socrates' praise of his interlocutors becomes ironical.

Thus, Socrates does appreciate Agathon's wisdom, even if the dialogue ultimately refutes it. Agathon's speech, after all, merely expounds a belief Socrates himself naively holds in the prologue, namely, that the beautiful seek the beautiful (174a9). Consequently, if we fault Agathon for thoughtlessly assuming that Eros works only in the beautiful (195a7-8; 196a8-b3) and for confusing the object of Eros with the people in whom Eros works, we must also censure Socrates for the same error.

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36Agathon is Socrates' main opponent, as 194a1-4 and 198a1-7 reveal. Thus, when Socrates says in the prologue that he fears for those who will speak last (177e3-5), he really means that he fears for himself who must speak after Agathon.

37Cf. Lowenstam, "Paradoxes," 86.
measure of intelligence and to take his encomium seriously, despite the irony in Socrates’ praise.

Ironic praise, moreover, is a tool used not only by Socrates against Agathon, but one used by Agathon against Socrates. Agathon seats Socrates next to himself; this move seemingly honors Socrates by placing him next to the host, but it also reinforces Agathon’s status: Agathon is brilliant enough to have Socrates as his honored guest and to sit next to so esteemed an intellectual.38 Although Agathon’s interest in Socrates’ thoughts is to a large degree genuine, Agathon does assume that he can defeat Socrates in a battle of wits (175e7-10); whatever thoughts have come to Socrates on the road are, in Agathon’s mind, inferior to his own.39 Thus, both Agathon and Socrates belittle one another with flattery to a degree done by no other set of characters in the prologue.40 Not surprisingly, then, Socrates will later use Agathon’s speech as a foil

38Von Blanckenhagen, 55, notes that single occupancy of a couch is more common in Attic red-figure vases, unless the pair on a couch are lovers (i.e., an older man and a youth or woman). Thus, Agathon by placing Socrates next to him is stating that Socrates is his lover.

39Not surprisingly, then, Agathon in his speech berates Socrates by describing Eros as a supple youth with great beauty—the exact opposite of Socrates. See Anderson, 47.

40Phaedrus flatters Eryximachus (176d5-e3) and Eryximachus praises the suggestion of Phaedrus (177a2-d5), as is only fitting for a lover and a beloved to act towards one another. But this does not match Socrates’ and Agathon’s somewhat ironic flattery of each other, that occupies 175c6-e6.
for his own. In so doing, he is continuing the argument he had with Agathon in the prologue (175d3-e10) and is taking up Agathon's challenge for a battle of wits (175c6-10). By implication, then, Agathon must be an interlocutor worthy of Socrates. If Agathon's speech fails to measure up fully to Socrates' or our standards, it nonetheless exemplifies a system of education and thought that was popular with the intellectuals of the late fifth century B.C. Athens.

If Agathon has grounds for claiming to be an intellectual whose speech is worth consideration, Eryximachus has an even greater claim. For although Agathon was among those who had overindulged the previous night, Eryximachus clearly excludes himself from οἱ δυνατῶτατοι πίνειν (176c2-3). His sobriety hints that his speech will have less rhetoric and more content than Agathon's. Thus, Eryximachus deserves a place among the lovers of ideas and, to be more specific, among those who do not mistake showy rhetoric for beautiful ideas.41

These qualities of Eryximachus are most apparent in his self-classification in the prologue. He distinguishes himself from those who constantly overdrink and force others to do so, too (176c2-3). He does, however, find some allies in his plea for moderation or abstinence in drinking: Phaedrus, Aristodemus, and some unnamed guests. Phaedrus, naturally, is an ally of Eryximachus; he is

41 As PW (11:607) indicates, all that we know about Eryximachus is drawn from the Platonic corpus, namely the Prt., the Symposium, and the Phaedrus.
Eryximachus' ἐρωμένος and, as we have already seen, a man fonder of books than the sensual life. Aristodemus, too, shares with Eryximachus a devotion to learning; Aristodemus is devoted to Socratic philosophy, while Eryximachus is a man of medicine and science. But the most interesting allies of Eryximachus are the unnamed τοίσδε (176c1). Without doubt, these men are the guests whose speeches Aristodemus was unable to recall at a later time. Apparently, they were men of moderation, but also men whose speeches were not memorable.42

By choosing these anonymous guests as his allies, Eryximachus demonstrates a weakness of his: though a man of ideas, he presents them in a pedantic fashion.43 As brilliant as his

42Mitchell, 15, wrongly understands the unnamed speakers to be the heavy drinkers. But the οἱ δυνατώτατοι πίνειν of 176c2-3 are Pausanias, Aristophanes, and Agathon, since Eryximachus is replying to their statements in 176a5-b1 and 176b2-4, and 176b8, respectively. If the unnamed speakers were the heavy drinkers, there would be no referent for the word τοίσδε (176c2), since all the known guests are accounted for elsewhere in 172c. Thus, the τοίσδε must be the unknown guests, which means they cannot be the οἱ δυνατώτατοι πίνειν.

43Mitchell, 63, notes that "'pedant' is often just a jealous way of referring to someone who knows something. That's the case here. Eryximachus knows something." Allen, 27-28, also defends Eryximachus by arguing that he anticipates Socrates' notion of Eros as a universal force. Konstan and Young-Bruehl argue further that Eryximachus' speech is second in sophistication only to that of Socrates. Eryximachus distinguishes between two loves: ἐπιθυμία, which can be either good or bad, and φιλία, which is always good, since it creates a harmony out of opposing forces. Moreover,
universalizing of Eros may be, Eryximachus' speech fails to inspire the reader since it is overly technical and ignores sexual passion as an expression of Eros. He takes a quotation from Heraclitus on harmony and through some leaps in logic uses it to prove that harmony consists of being in unison, not in having two complementary tones (187a5-c1). This misunderstanding reveals the serious flaw in his personality: Eryximachus prefers a bland unison over a well-tensioned harmony. Furthermore, he begins his speech by drawing on his medical expertise--to describe not sexual passion, but the healthy and unhealthy urges of the body (186b3-7). Regulation of bodily urges, he maintains, is something that belongs to medicine (186c5-e3). Thus, love is removed from the realm of the

Konstan and Young-Bruehl, 40-46, clear Eryximachus of the charge of misinterpretation of Heraclitus commonly leveled against him.

In reply, we must grant that Eryximachus' pedantry has its positive elements: it demonstrates that he has a fair amount of knowledge. But a pedant does not know as much as the person who is able to communicate his ideas in a more interesting fashion. Thus, Socrates must be held in higher esteem than Eryximachus, since the former's speech, though learned, communicates a more compelling vision of Eros. By comparison, few readers would name the latter's speech as the most memorable one of the dialogue. In large part, this is due to Eryximachus' refusal to discuss Eros in terms of sex and his use of physics and other τεχνά to explain Eros. As Duncan argues, 278-281, Eryximachus stresses a "vertical view of Eros," which sees Eros as a manifestation of abstract concepts rather than as a relationship between human beings. As a student of Hippias, Eryximachus prefers the simplicity found in nature rather than the complexity found in human society.

Cf. Wolz, 333. Dover, Symposium, 105, posits that Eryximachus exemplifies the habit of ancient scientists to over-generalize to the point of absurdity.
lover; instead, erotic forces are directed by an expert: the physician (186e4-187a1), musician (187c2-5), or prophet (188b6-d3).

Eryximachus' pedantry is demonstrated already in the prologue. He is overjoyed to lecture the guests about the dangers of drunkenness (176c7-8); he smirks, as he sees a group of men who must concede that his medical advice is correct. As the expert in this field, he holds such sway over the crowd that none of the guests dares to chafe at his lecture or object when he dismisses the flute-girl, sets the terms of drinking, and establishes the agenda for the evening. It is his medical expertise alone that sways the crowd, since he can muster no moral arguments, only medical ones, against overdrinking. His vision of life is narrowed by his devotion to medicine.45

Eryximachus' pedantry is in marked contrast to Socrates' attitude. Although both men pursue the intellectual life, Socrates neither specializes in a narrow field of learning nor withdraws from sensual pleasure, as Eryximachus does.46 Socrates never adopts

45Bury, xxviii, comments that Eryximachus "seizes every possible occasion to air his medical lore," not only concerning drunkenness but also hiccoughs. Bury, xxix, adds that there is little literary adornment in Eryximachus' speech, as befits such a pedant.

46Cf. Warner's judgment, 167: "Great pains are taken to distance Socrates from Eryximachus; the latter is presented as pompous and insensitive, with no apparent first-hand experience of love, and without a clear grasp of the issues in question." Though Warner overstates the case--Eryximachus has had first-hand experience in love with Phaedrus--he is correct in observing Eryximachus' pedantry.
the jargon of a specialized profession: In other dialogues of Plato, Socrates speaks with generals about courage, with teachers about wisdom, and with statesmen about justice; in this dialogue Alcibiades accuses Socrates of talking about non-technical matters ("pack mules and certain bronze smiths, cobblers, and tanners," 221e4-5). Nor does Socrates equate the intellectual life with flight from pleasure, as Eryximachus does. Socrates can drink with the best or he can forego drink altogether (176c3-5). Socrates can enjoy sensual pleasure without being seduced by it, but Eryximachus is as easily influenced by alcohol as the overindulgent are. Eryximachus avoids being seduced by sensual pleasure only by avoiding all contact with sensual pleasure.

Eryximachus, then, is a caricature of Socrates. He seems to have Socrates' moderation and learning, but the appearance is deceptive. For true appreciation of Beauty comes not by embracing intellectual beauty alone and ignoring physical beauty, but by using physical beauty to lead oneself to the beauty of ideas--and beyond. In fact, all three lovers of rhetoric and sophistry are caricatures of Socrates. Like Socrates, they are Eros-like in their longing for a non-sensual beauty, but unlike Socrates, they have confused the beauty

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47For example, in the Laches, Socrates argues with two generals, Nicias and Laches. In the Gorgias, Socrates discusses issues of morality with Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles, all of whom claim to know and teach where true happiness lies. In the Protagoras, Socrates discusses the relation between knowledge and virtue with the sophist Protagoras and other assembled intellectuals.
of words or pieces of information with Absolute Beauty. Their love is
nobler than that of Pausanias and Aristophanes, but they fail to
discern as lofty a goal of love as Socrates does.

The Ἐρωστής of Absolute Beauty: Socrates

As we observed in the last section, Socrates is unique among
the guests. He neither allows himself to be overcome by drink (as do
Pausanias and Aristophanes) nor does he retreat from pleasures into
his own specialized world (as does Eryximachus). No matter how
much he is surrounded by drink or by beautiful bodies, his mind is
never overcome by them. He can drink without letting the alcohol
govern his head; he can enjoy the beautiful young men around him in
a non-sexual manner. He is prevented from being seduced by the
pleasures of sensuous beauty because his first desire is for Absolute
Beauty. The beauty observed by the senses, as far as Socrates is
concerned, serves only to lead to a higher beauty; to perceive beauty
only with the senses or to gratify oneself with that beauty is to rob
oneself of enjoyment of the greater beauty.

Socrates’ preference for Absolute Beauty over the beauty of the
body can be seen as merely a defense of Socrates’ character against
those who slandered him for seducing the youth of Athens. One
cannot deny that Alcibiades’ speech portrays Socrates in a positive
light; the “scandal” of Socrates, according to Alcibiades, is that there is
no scandal to be found, despite Alcibiades’ persistent attempts to
seduce him (219c7-d2). Although Alcibiades attempts to portray
Socrates as hybristic, the reader soon discovers that Socrates' mistreatment of Alcibiades lies in Socrates' refusal to seduce Alcibiades rather than in any wanton seduction of Alcibiades. Socrates' good behavior can be nothing but offensive to men like Alcibiades who are of rather offensive moral character. 48

Socrates' character, however, also serves a deeper purpose: Socrates dramatizes Plato's conception of the perfect Eros, who seeks Absolute Beauty. The notion of a perfect Eros may at first glance seem somewhat contradictory, since Eros by nature is imperfect, but calling Socrates a perfect Eros figure does not imply that Socrates is perfect. Rather, it means that he best dramatizes the quest for perfection, illustrating for the reader Eros' quest for Absolute Beauty. 49

This quest begins with the appreciation of beautiful bodies. Thus, when Socrates first appears in the dialogue, he is preoccupied with the prospect of seeing the beautiful Agathon. Agathon has invited him to a banquet and Socrates has accepted the invitation, on the provision that he can attend the less crowded of the two parties. The more intimate setting of the second party will allow Socrates

48Similarly, the dialogue portrays Socrates as being on more cordial terms with his critic Aristophanes than history--or Aristophanes' comedies--would have us believe.

49This phenomenon is not surprising, since of all the guests Socrates has the most comprehensive theory of Eros. See pages 59-61.
more of an opportunity to enjoy, among other things, Agathon’s beauty.

The prospect of encountering sensuous beauty changes Socrates’ demeanor. No longer can Socrates neglect his own appearance, running around barefoot and unwashed (174a4). Now he must beautify himself so that he can attend the party of handsome Agathon. He must go καλὸς παρὰ καλὸν (174a9). Socrates demonstrates thereby the beautifying and ennobling force of sensuous beauty, a truth observed by Phaedrus and Agathon. Eros, in awe of Beauty, even the beauty of the body, must make itself equally beautiful. As Phaedrus notes, a lover shirks the ugliness of cowardice and strives to be as beautiful in performing heroic deeds as his beloved is beautiful (178d4-e1; 179a3-b5), and, as Agathon notes, Eros transforms lovers to be more musical and graceful (196d6-e3). By beautifying his appearance, Socrates demonstrates that beauty, even of the sensuous kind, has a transforming power.

If beauty ennobles the lover, however, he must not have been noble and beautiful previously. This is a truth that escapes all the other guests in the dialogue, but especially Agathon. Although Agathon believes that Eros can make an unmusical man brim with poetry, Agathon does not think Eros can influence old, ugly, or harsh men (195b1-4, e5-196a4). Thus, when Agathon speaks of the great benefits Eros brings to lovers, he assumes that the lovers already possess these qualities, but must have them nurtured and developed.
As Socrates argues in his encomium, however, only those who lack beauty desire beauty.

Learning this truth is a crucial step on the Ascent to Beauty because it redefines the goal of Eros and redirects the search for Absolute Beauty. Eros becomes a search for acquisition of beauty rather than mere enjoyment of the sensuous beauty of others. Eros ultimately leads to Absolute Beauty, which alone can give enduring beauty to a lover. The beauty of the body is all too fleeting for a lover to rely upon. The beauty of ideas, though more enduring than sensuous beauty, cannot compare to the Absolute Beauty that gives them their beauty. Thus, the best lover must recognize his need for beauty in its most permanent form, if he is not merely to deceive himself with imitations of Beauty.

Crucial as this insight is for one to be a perfect lover, only Socrates understands this truth--and he learns or relearns this truth in the prologue.\(^{50}\) Instinctively, Socrates knows he is not beautiful but

\(^{50}\)Whether Socrates learns or relearns it depends on what we make of Socrates' use of Diotima. Does Plato intend the reader to understand that Socrates is inventing a conversation with Diotima, since the conversation seems tailor-made for the symposium? Or does Plato intend the conversation with Diotima to represent a "fact" in the fictional world he has created in the *Symposium*? In either case, the *Symposium* and all its events are fictional; the question is whether the speech of Diotima is a fictional fiction or a fictional fact. If it is a fictional fiction, the character Socrates (not the Socrates of history) has learned a truth on the way to the banquet, which he is presenting to the symposiasts. If it is a fictional fact, the character Socrates has relearned a truth he was taught fifteen years ago, but which he had forgotten until he meditated on the way to see Agathon. Since Diotima's speech builds on items discussed previously, it is best
must become so ( γεγενημένος, 174a5; cf. the factitive verb καλλωπισάμην in 174a8-9). Yet, at first, Socrates is somewhat oblivious to the lack of beauty in himself apart from the beauty in the objects of his desire. He includes himself among the ἄγαθοι who naturally go to the feast of the good and playfully chides those like Homer who have a φαῦλος man go to the home of a good man. By the time Socrates delivers his encomium to Eros, however, he has changed his mind. He realizes that it is not the good and the beautiful who seek Good and Beauty, but rather people who recognize they lack such qualities. By recognizing this truth, Socrates has become the perfect lover of Beauty.

What gives Socrates this insight? The most natural answer is that Socrates contemplates on this matter as he goes to Agathon's house. He has already begun thinking on this topic before he meets Aristodemus, as is indicated by his giving a thoughtful reason for beautifying himself (174a8-9). When Aristodemus comes, Socrates to see her as a fictional fiction, as Anderson, 51, and Warner, 170, argue.

Lowenstam, "Paradoxes," 86, argues for a similar understanding of Diotima. He adds that in Socrates' speech "Plato presents a unique opportunity for us to see how Socrates, whether it be the historical one or not, came to conclusions. We see Socrates flippantly choose one view-point, change views after some thought, and then explain for us the process by which he arrived at his conclusion." Thus, the character Socrates uses Diotima as a means to expound a conclusion that he himself had reached only a few hours earlier.

51 There is a pun involved here, but Socrates has the proverb in this fashion in mind. See Renehan, 120-121.
begins contemplating critically about the ideas behind a particular incident in Homer. Socrates, thus, starts with the prospect of seeing καλός Agathon and progresses higher on the ladder of beauty by contemplating beautiful ideas. But the central thought on Socrates' mind is the precise nature of Beauty and its lovers: Who loves Beauty and what effect does Beauty have on its lovers? Because this question is Socrates' object of thought, he is quickly led to contemplate Absolute Beauty--more quickly than if he had been thinking of some other matter. Physical beauty has spurred Socrates on to question who truly possesses beauty. In turn, pondering this question has led him to see a vision of Absolute Beauty. Thus, it is contemplation on the nature of beauty that leads ultimately to a glimpse of Absolute Beauty.

Although Socrates is the only guest to be so moved by Beauty so as to attain this goal and although insights from the contemplation of Absolute Beauty are not readily shared, he nonetheless attempts to lead one of his beloveds, Aristodemus, up with him on the Ascent to Beauty. In this way, he follows the outline of Diotima, who sees the Ascent as usually involving a lover who guides his beloved, as is implied by 210a4-8, b4-6. The lover (Socrates in this case) begins

52These passages imply that a young man pursues Beauty by acting as a lover; cf. διὰ τὸ ὀρθῶς παιδεραστεῖν ἐπανιῶν (211b5-6) and ἐπὶ τὰ ἐρωτικὰ ἴναι (211 b7-c1). Other passages, however, suggest that a beloved, too, can ascend to Absolute Beauty: One can be a lover himself or be led by another (ὑπ’ ἄλλου ἀγεσθαι, 211c1). To confuse matters even further, the lover often needs the guidance of someone else, the ἠγούμενος (210a6-7), who is perhaps a lover.
with one beloved (Agathon) but soon realizes the beauty to be found in many bodies (Aristodemus and Agathon). Next, the lover looks for the beauty in the soul and discusses beautiful ideas with the beloved. Socrates performs this task in 174b3-d4, where he discusses whether the good or the bad go to the banquets of the good. But at a particular stage, Socrates acquires a vision of Absolute Beauty, which he cannot impart to his beloved, for Absolute Beauty is not an idea that can be expressed or a vision that can be described with words. He stands in deep thought on the porch, entranced by Absolute Beauty (174d4-175c6). If the beauty of gold, clothes, and lads can leave one speechless and unable to eat or drink, but only able to stare, Absolute Beauty renders one even more incapable of expression (211d3-e4). Thus, Socrates lets Aristodemus go ahead to the party and does not answer Agathon's questions, since he cannot communicate to either of them his glimpse of Absolute Beauty. Since

Thus, the person ascending to Beauty may be involved in several relationships: He may be an ἐρωμένος being led by his lover. Or he may be a lover who, on the one hand, is being taught by a ἔγουμένος how to pursue beauty properly, while, on the other hand, having an ἐρωμένος whom he attempts to raise to a higher awareness of beauty, as he himself ascends higher. Anderson's remarks, 61, offer help in understanding this: "[G]uidance comes from beauty," not from the lover or beloved; "since this is an active pursuit of the beauty, both ἔραστής and ἐρωμένος are in that sense lovers."

To be sure, Aristodemus is not as beautiful as Agathon, since the former is called σμικρός and maintains Socrates' unkempt appearance (173b2). Nonetheless, since the beauty in all bodies (210b3) is akin, a true lover will find beauty even in less beautiful bodies. Thus, Socrates deems even Aristodemus as a man capable of begetting beautiful ideas with himself.
Socrates cannot describe in words his vision of Absolute Beauty, he wishes that he could impart his knowledge by osmosis (175d3-7).54

Socrates demonstrates that, although the quest for Absolute Beauty must begin with social intercourse, it must be completed in isolation. This isolation caused by the pursuit of Absolute Beauty is seen in the prologue as Socrates stands apart from the rest of the guests on the porch during half of the meal (175a7-c6). Although Socrates had earlier been eager to dine with handsome Agathon, his pursuit of Absolute Beauty sidetracked him. As soon as Socrates got a glimpse of Absolute Beauty, he preferred it to the charm of Agathon.

54One should not conclude from the difficulties of imparting philosophical truth that philosophy must be solipsistic or nihilistic. Roochnik, 127, aptly describes Platonic philosophy in this way: "Philosophical discourse never reaches its desired terminus. It is forever the love, and not the possession, of wisdom. To formulate this, and much of the above, succinctly, philosophical discourse is fundamentally interrogative. Its paradigmatic sentence is the question, and not the assertion. This is not to say that all philosophers do is ask questions: that would be absurd. They ask questions, entertain possible answers, review such answers, and then proceed forward once again. To describe philosophical discourse as interrogative is thus very close to calling it dialectical or, more precisely, dialogical." Roochnik adds, 126, that the philosopher differs from the sophist in that the latter disowns reason and objective knowledge, while the philosopher is always pursuing objective truth.

Although Lowenstam, "Paradoxes," 87, sees a similar outline between the journey to Agathon's house and the Ascent to Beauty, he argues that Socrates plays the role of Eros, guiding the philosopher (Aristodemus) along the path to the Good, then at the last moment abandoning him so that he can discover the Good (Agathon) on his own. But surely Socrates is the philosopher (who by definition is also an Eros-figure), who guides his beloved along the path to the good. Moreover, nowhere does Diotima mention that Eros disappears during a stage of the Ascent to Beauty.
Yet despite the higher nature of Absolute Beauty, it is difficult to pursue because it is so ephemeral. The beauty of a body or even an idea or speech is readily manifest to the observer, as often as he cares to observe it. Absolute Beauty, however, does not readily appear, but can be glimpsed only after much labor and then for a brief time only. For this reason, Socrates calls his wisdom φαύλη (175e3). Although it is really life that becomes φαύλον (211e4-212a2), when compared to Absolute Beauty, those who pursue Absolute Beauty must feel frustrated since they cannot possess it permanently. It may seem better to enjoy a more down-to-earth beauty and wisdom (as Agathon does) rather than to pursue an ephemeral Absolute Beauty.55

55Scholars have observed flaws in Socrates' concept of Eros and Beauty. In particular, Nussbaum, 166-167, and Vlastos, *Platonic Studies* 2d. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 31, have argued that Socratic love ignores the reality of inter-personal relationships in favor of an ethereal, non-altruistic love. Defenders of Socrates include Nye, “The Subject of Love: Diotima and her Critics,” (hereafter Nye, “Love”) *Journal of Value Inquiry* 24 (1990) 133-153, who argues that Diotima is not urging a lover to leave the beloved as he or she progresses toward Absolute Beauty, but rather to understand that love involves more than just love of a beloved, but love of his or her friends, ideas, and politics. In a slightly different vein, Wolz, 347, argues that just as “the absolutely asocial state in the *Protagoras* and the absolutely perfect city in the *Republic* are merely devices which Plato employs to block all possible escape from reality and to induce men resolutely to face the human condition,” so the Ascent to Beauty in the *Symposium* forces the reader away from an other-worldly ascent back into human relationships.

To be sure, the dialogue, including Alcibiades' speech, does show an ethereal form of love is unable to lead others to virtue; moreover, Socrates calls his wisdom φαύλη for the reasons states
Thus, as I have argued earlier, Socrates' praise of Agathon in 175d3-e6 must be taken both in an ironic and in a straightforward manner. Socrates does believe that his knowledge of Absolute Beauty makes Agathon's wisdom appear shallow and we, like Agathon, are correct in finding irony in Socrates' words. To the extent, however, that Socrates cannot communicate his insight into Absolute Beauty and cannot maintain his glimpse of it, Socrates' wisdom is indeed \( \phi\alpha\upsilon\lambda\eta \). It demonstrates that Socrates remains a perfect lover, not a perfect possessor, of Beauty.

**The Ascent to Beauty Itself Dramatized**

To some degree, each of the characters has demonstrated the proper way to pursue Eros. In particular, Socrates has personified the quest for Absolute Beauty, as we saw on pages 115-122. To the above. However, these elements do not demonstrate the error of Socrates as much as the tension in the human condition between the longing for the absolute and its rare fulfillment. A better explanation, then, is that the dialogue urges the search for an abstract Beauty while demonstrating the difficulties in putting such a search into practice. Thus, Duncan, 287-289, argues that the *Symposium* is an aporetic dialogue, in that it offers two views of love, one stressing the horizontal or human aspect, the other the vertical aspect or the striving for virtue. If Aristophanes deprives lovers of growth in knowledge and virtue because he overemphasizes the physical aspects of love, Socrates treats his beloveds hubristically because he denies the physical side of love.

The difficulty of the Socratic concept of Eros lies in human nature itself, as Roochnik, 128, aptly notes. Eros "is not an object but a capacity to enter into relationships with objects.... Socrates understands how various objects satisfy different kinds of human beings. He understands how logos is the principle motor of satisfaction for those moving beyond the first stage of human development."
degree that the Ascent has been dramatized in this fashion, there is no need to reiterate the notion of Socrates as Eros (or for that matter any of the other characters as lesser Erotes).

Plato, however, also hints in a more indirect manner at how to pursue Beauty. He does so by making an allusion to the Ascent to Beauty: the ascent of Apollodorus and Glaucon into town. The behavior of the prologue’s characters alludes to the Ascent, not in so much as they themselves are participating in the Ascent or are objects of true Beauty, but rather in so far as Plato endows their purely mundane actions with philosophical, almost allegorical, significance. Thus, in this section we will not be looking at how the characters act qua characters or how the plot is overtly erotic, as we did earlier in the chapter. Rather, we will examine how even utterly unerotic men can manifest the longings of Eros and how even men dispossessed of true Beauty can nonetheless serve as examples of it, if only in word.

Such an example can be seen in the geography of the Apollodoran prologue (172a1-174a2). As the dialogue begins, Apollodorus is on his way up into town, coming from the deme Phalerum.56 His journey into town requires that he physically ascend from the sea level to a higher elevation; hence asciv, "ascending," is an appropriate description. As he is on his way up into town, Glaucon greets him from behind (δτίνθε, 172a3) and from quite a distance

56Dover, Symposium, 77: “Phalerum lies on the coast east of Piraeus and two miles southwest of the city perimeter.”
(πόρρωθεν, 172a3). This necessarily places him closer to the sea, further from Athens, and on a lower level than Apollodorus. Nonetheless, Glaucon seems to have intended to go into town; he must have been heading in the same direction as Apollodorus in order for him to espy Apollodorus. Furthermore, he raises no objections when Apollodorus suggests that Glaucon accompany him into town so that Apollodorus may relate the speeches of Eros along the way (173b7-c1).

This ascent of two characters into Athens would seem insignificant, were it not for the emphasis on the Ascent to Beauty in the climax of Socrates' speech. Since, however, Plato emphasizes the concept of ascent in the body of the dialogue, the literal ascent of Apollodorus and Glaucon gains new meaning, even if Apollodorus and Glaucon are not perfect embodiments of Eros. Apollodorus' ascent into town thus exemplifies the attempt to ascend to Beauty as carried out by those entranced by Socratic dialogue. Since Glaucon is ignorant of this particular dialogue, he must stand on a lower plane and, thus, behind Apollodorus. Since he is a pupil of Socrates, however, it is only right that he also should be en route to the city. Then, as Apollodorus relates the story, the two walk to town and arrive there at the same time, for when Apollodorus has told Glaucon all that he knows about the symposium, the two are on the same plane. Furthermore, by hearing a dialogue about Eros, they both have ascended, at least to some degree, on the Ladder of Beauty, as is exemplified by their ascending to Athens.
This interpretation of geography as indicative of philosophical process would seem overly subtle, were it not for a couple of factors. Firstly, Plato rarely sets any dialogue outside Athens.\textsuperscript{57} Thus, when the prologue of the \textit{Symposium} portrays two people outside Athens, it is already worth noting. Secondly, and more importantly, Plato uses the geography of the \textit{Symposium} in the same way he uses that of the \textit{Republic}. As we observed in the first chapter,\textsuperscript{58} Plato uses the descent in the prologue of the \textit{Republic} to dramatize the descent into the cave. Socrates and Glaucon attempt to go up to the city, but are dragged down once again to the Piraeus by Polemarchus. The body of the \textit{Republic} then portrays Socrates descending into ordinary human society (the cave) to persuade his interlocutors that their concept of justice is a mere shadow of the truth. The \textit{Symposium}, in contrast, portrays Socrates leading men upward in the pursuit of beauty. The reader ought not to be surprised, then, that in a dialogue devoted to the Ascent to Beauty, the prologue would describe a geographical ascent.

The use of geography as metaphor for philosophical process is underscored by the verbal parallels between the two prologues, as

\textsuperscript{57}The only dialogues in which he does are the \textit{Republic}, which is set in the Piraeus, the harbor of Athens; the \textit{Phaedrus}, which is set in the countryside; the \textit{Phaedo}, whose narration takes place in Phlius (after Socrates is dead); and the \textit{Laws}, which is set in Crete.

\textsuperscript{58}See pages 21-23.
seen in the similarities between the second sentence of the *Symposium* and the first sentence of the *Republic*:

\[
\text{kai } \gamma' \gamma \varepsilon \tau \gamma \upsilon \gamma \chi \alpha \nu \upsilon \nu \pi \rho \omega \eta \nu \varepsilon \iota \sigma \tau \nu \iota \kappa \iota \kappa \theta \varepsilon \upsilon \varepsilon \nu\ (\text{Symp. 172a2-3})
\]

\[
\text{κατέβην } \chi \theta \varepsilon \varepsilon \iota \ Πειραῖα μετὰ Γλαύκωνος τοῦ 'Αρίστωνος (\text{Resp. 1.327a1})
\]

In both cases there is a verb which either by itself (κατέβην) or with a supplementary participle (ἐτύγχανον... ἀνιών) denotes travel, followed by an adverb of time (πρόφην, χθες), followed by a prepositional phrase indicating destination (εἰς ἄστυ, εἰς Πειραῖα). In the *Symposium* Glaucon espies Apollodorus from afar (κατιδὼν μὲ πόρρωθεν, 172a3), while in the *Republic* Polemarchus espies Glaucon and Socrates (κατιδὼν οὖν πόρρωθεν Ἦμας, 1.327b2). In both cases the participle of κατιδεῖν and the adverb πόρρωθεν are used. In both dialogues the interlocutor hails the narrator from behind (δόπισθεν; *Symp. 172a3, Resp. 327b4) and asks him to περιμέναι (Symp. 172a5, Resp. 1.327b3).59

59Other similarities exist. Glaucon is present in both dialogues. In the *Symposium* he accosts Apollodorus, but in the *Republic* he is accosted along with Socrates by Polemarchus. (Indeed, the parallel between the *Republic* and the *Symposium* may be the joke [172a4] that eludes modern commentators: Glaucon is treating Apollodorus as Glaucon was treated by Polemarchus in the *Republic*. Certainly, Dover's explanation [*Symposium, 77*], that the joke lies in Glaucon's "feigned urgency," is inadequate.) Furthermore, both dialogues are set shortly after a sacrifice has been made: In the *Republic* Socrates is on his way back to Athens after making sacrifice to the goddess (1.327a2); in the *Symposium* Socrates attends Agathon's party after Agathon made the victory sacrifices (173a6-7). Although Allen, 9,
In both dialogues, then, a character briefly stops and for a moment the reader does not know whether the character will continue his upward journey or change course; in the Symposium, Apollodorus continues his ascent to Athens, while in the Republic Socrates is forced to return to the Piraeus. Since both dialogues portray learning as an ascent from the material world to the immaterial, each prologue’s description of a physical ascent reflects the metaphysical ascent taking place in the dialogue.

One could argue that the literal journeys of the prologues add nothing to the dialogues, since the reader must rely on the “philosophical” portions of the dialogue to explicate these journeys and even then the interpretation is more allegorical than a direct application of philosophical principles to a concrete situation. Yet the interpreter’s reliance on the body of the dialogue for interpretation of the prologue does not undermine this way of looking at Apollodorus’ journey. The “philosophical” portion of the dialogue turns us away from the “philosophical”: The philosophy of the dialogue reveals that Eros is not a force solely apprehended by philosophy. Even in Socrates’ scheme, Eros remains an irrational force that affects not only men, but animals (207a8-c1). Thus, while the body of the dialogue may explain Eros with intellectual arguments, the prologue admits that the Symposium bears an affinity with the Phaedo, “Its main philosophical filiation is with the Republic: the account of Beauty itself at 210a-212a anticipates the account of the Good in Resp. 6 (506b-509b).

60 Symp. 210a4-212b7; Resp. 7.514a1-517a6.
illustrates the work of Eros. It does so not only by showing men acting under the sway of Eros, but also by portraying in a more abstract way man's desire to ascend to Beauty.

Moreover, interpreting the ascent to Athens in both dialogues as symbolic of the philosophical ascent is the best way of "preserving the data." Plato has set the prologue of both dialogues in specific geographical circumstances. Since there is no other ostensible way to explain the necessity of these geographical details—which are not simply made in passing—and since the motif of ascent and descent appears in crucial passages of these dialogues, the simplest solution is to understand that the geography of the prologues reflects the content of the dialogue. It underscores the allusions in the prologue to the Ascent to Beauty already noted.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen that the behavior of the characters in the prologue illustrates their attitudes toward Beauty and, thus, the way in which Eros works in them. We have seen that each character in the prologue prepares the reader for the way in which he will describe Eros; moreover, the prologue alerts the reader to certain nuances in those speeches that would have escaped the reader's attention, if the prologue were omitted.

The prologue allows us to see these nuances, since the guests speak without the restraints imposed upon them later, as they follow the rules of giving an encomium. The reader gets more of a glimpse
into their personalities and can see how the personalities of the guests color their understanding of Eros. More importantly, the reader sees in the prologue actions motivated by Eros. If the reader adopts the broad definition of Eros held by Socrates, he is able to observe a wide range of behavior that can be called erotic. In line with the Socratic definition, the reader can then discern a hierarchy among the guests, with the lovers of the sensual on the bottom and the lover of Absolute Beauty on the top.

Since Socrates invites the other guests to attempt to ascend to Absolute Beauty, it is fitting that the prologue make two allusions to the ascent. First, there is the allusion to the ascent in the Apollodorus’ journey up to Athens in the first half of the prologue. Second, and more importantly, there is a demonstration of the ascent by Socrates, who begins with the prospect of physical beauty and then gets a glimpse of Absolute Beauty. In both instances, Plato is inviting the reader to examine what the Ascent entails and how it appears to the external observer.

Thus, the character and dramas of the prologue are examples of individuals searching for Beauty and the Good. Although the body of the dialogue will give detailed and rational explanations of the search, the characters and drama of the prologue demonstrate the importance and universality of the search.
CHAPTER FOUR
EROS OF BEAUTY AND THE GOOD:
EROS IN THE DICTION OF THE PROLOGUE

So far we have argued that each of the characters manifests Eros in a unique way. The behavior of each character in the prologue either foreshadows his theory of Eros or reveals a dimension to his speech that would have perhaps gone unnoticed had there been no dramatic prologue to the encomia. Not only, however, does the characterization of the *dramatis personae* manifest Eros, but so do many of the words in the prologue. Through his choice of diction, Plato constantly interweaves allusions to Eros and his work with the drama of the dialogue.

In his use of words, Plato can be so subtle that many of his allusions to Eros may escape the reader. In large part, the subtlety of the allusions arises from Plato's lack of a technical vocabulary. Unlike Aristotle and later philosophers, Plato does not have a set vocabulary that he employs only for philosophical matters; even some of his technical vocabulary, such as δόξα, he uses in a non-technical sense.¹ Instead, he draws on common words to describe intricate

¹For example, Guthrie has observed that Plato does not consistently use the word εἶδος to refer to the Forms or Ideas. Indeed, if one takes the εἶδη of Republic 3.402b-c to refer to the Forms, then Socrates' statement would contradict with his arguments elsewhere in the dialogue. As Guthrie demonstrates, however non-technical
philosophical concepts and processes. As Alcibiades puts it, Socrates’ words—that is, the words of Plato’s Socrates—are full of “pack mules and certain bronze smiths, cobblers, and tanners” (221e4-5), which, however, point to a larger reality. Thus, the words Plato employs to describe his most important philosophical concepts are frequently ordinary terms that derive a weightier philosophical sense from the context. Even Plato’s most technical term—εἰδος or ἰδέα—at its heart merely denotes something that is seen.2

Not surprisingly, then, the Symposium contains many words that are used to describe both erotic and ordinary human activity.

occurrences of εἰδος abound in this dialogue noted for its use of εἰδος in its technical sense. See Guthrie, 4:459-460, 498, 509.


2εἰδος can merely mean the exterior appearance of an object, as in Chrm. 154d4: οὗτως τὸ εἰδος πάγκαλος ἔστιν. The interchangeability of technical and non-technical senses of words in Plato should not surprise the astute reader, since Plato can be horribly imprecise, even when he is using technical vocabulary. In 202a2-9, Diotima sets forth the distinction between ignorance and knowledge, and posits an intermediate state between the two, namely, right opinion. As she puts forth this theory, she uses different words for knowledge and right opinion:

<table>
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<th>passage</th>
<th>ignorance</th>
<th>right opinion</th>
<th>knowledge</th>
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<td>ἀμαθία</td>
<td>not mentioned</td>
<td>σοφία</td>
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<td>202a5-8:</td>
<td>ἀμαθία</td>
<td>τὸ ὅρθα δοξάζειν ἐπιστασθαί/ἐπιστήμη</td>
<td>φρόνησις</td>
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<tr>
<td>202a9:</td>
<td>ἀμαθία</td>
<td>ἦ ὅρθα δόξα</td>
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Furthermore, since Plato argues throughout the dialogue that the presence of Eros is not confined only to one branch of human activity, it is not inappropriate to see the "ordinary" uses of a word as having an erotic overtone. There can be no hard and fast line of demarcation between a word's technical and ordinary senses.

Of course, one may object that it is not Plato’s use of allusion that is subtle, but rather the interpreter’s discovery of it. The reader, nonetheless, ought not to be deterred from attempting to discover erotic overtones to ordinary words in the dialogue, especially in light of the hermeneutical arguments set forth in the first chapter of this dissertation. This hermeneutic is confirmed by Plato’s use of word play, which indicates that Plato is well aware of a word’s several senses. For example, Plato has Socrates “abuse” the common proverb, ἀγαθῶν ἐπὶ δαίτας ἰασιν αὐτόματοι ἀγαθοί (174b4-5). In place of ἀγαθῶν Socrates substitutes Ἀγαθῶνων.3 Plato is aware

3This is the most credible explanation of the passage. Dover, Symposium, 81-82, completely misunderstands the proverb (παρομία), believing that Socrates has substituted ἀγαθῶν for δειλῶν. Bury, 8-9, makes the same error. He notes that the proverb existed in antiquity in both forms, but argues that the original proverb had ἀγαθῶν, which was parodied by Cratinus and Eupolis to read δειλῶν; nonetheless, says Bury, Socrates assumes that δειλῶν is the older form of the proverb and parodies it by changing δειλῶν to ἀγαθῶν. Bury’s explanation, however, does not hold up under scrutiny. What would be Socrates’ purpose in corrupting the proverb by changing δειλῶν to ἀγαθῶν? The example that Socrates cites, that of Menelaus going to Agamemnon’s banquet, assumes that the proverb has the good, not the cowardly, going to the feast of the good, with the incident in Homer being a violation of the rule.
that Agathon's name sounds like the word for “good” in Greek. Since he will connect Beauty and Good later in the dialogue (204e1-2), Plato uses Agathon's name to allude to the quest for the Good that is inherent in the quest for Beauty.

For the sake of the pun we must forget certain aspects of Agathon's nature. As far as the pun is concerned, Agathon is no longer to be thought of as the overindulgent poetaster whose beauty is only skin deep. Rather he is a manifestation of the Absolute Beauty, from which all beauty is derived. Through the pun, Agathon has become ἀγαθός. Thus, although Plato portrays Agathon elsewhere as a less than ideal lover of Beauty, Plato here treats him as if he were Absolute Beauty personified.

Agathon, nonetheless, remains Agathon, despite Socrates' pun. Therefore, we must distinguish between word play or allusion from allegory. When Plato makes a pun or an allusion, he makes a tangential connection between an ordinary person or object and another person, object, or a philosophical idea. If Plato's word-plays

Nonetheless, Socrates has changed the proverb in some fashion. But how? The most common explanation is that he has substituted the dative 'Ἀγάθων' (i.e., 'Ἀγαθωνι) for the expected genitive ἀγαθῶν. Yet, as Renehan, 120-121, has observed, it is not good Greek grammar to use the dative to state a person's destination. Therefore, Renehan suggests that Plato originally wrote 'Ἀγαθώνων, which later by haplology was reduced to 'Ἀγάθων.

As Anderson, 67, notes, this is not the only occasion when Plato makes a pun on Agathon's name. Agathon boasts in his speech that “Eros 'cared for the good [ἐπιμελήσε ἀγαθῶν].” Later, Socrates compels Agathon “to admit that Eros lacks the good (ἀγαθῶν ἐνδειχ).”
were to lead the reader to allegorize the people and objects in the
dialogue, they would become mere ciphers for philosophical ideas or
phenomena. This would lead the reader to face countless difficulties
of interpretation. It is possible, for example, to see a tangential
connection between Agathon and the Good, but it is impossible to see
Agathon as the embodiment of the Good in the dialogue. Every deed
that Agathon performs is not an example of the sort of behavior
expected from the Good. Rather, Plato continues to endow Agathon
with those traits that a fourth century BC reader would have expected
to find in Agathon. Thus, we cannot allegorize Agathon to stand for
the Good throughout the dialogue, but we can recognize that in one
particular instance (174b4-5) Agathon's name has become
something greater than Agathon himself.

Thus, we must distinguish sometimes between what is
happening in re and what is happening in verbo. Agathon's name
alludes to the good, but Socrates in going to his house is not
ascending to the good, but to a man who is µαλθακός (174c1). Hence
the complexity of interpretation: Plato hints at a deeper meaning
behind some of the names and events, but the history of the
characters intrudes often enough to prevent the reader from reading
the story as mere allegory. Is Agathon an ideal picture of the Good?
Or is he a man utterly devoid of true Beauty? Plato answers "yes" to
both questions. To the degree that he is effeminate and his speech
sophistic, he resembles Socrates' portrait of Menelaus4 and,
consequently, is not truly good. Yet to the degree that his name alludes to the Good, Agathon represents the Good. Agathon’s house is Socrates’ destination, even as the Good is the destination of all lovers.5

Plato’s word play, therefore, ought to open the readers’ eyes to possible erotic overtones in the ordinary phrases of the prologue. But as readers pursue these overtones, they ought not to allegorize the text, i.e., to turn the possible erotic overtones into the chief aim of exegesis of the text. The overtones, to shift the metaphor slightly, are

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4 Socrates’ cites Apollo’s rebuke of Menelaus in *Iliad* 17 as proof that Menelaus was an inferior warrior, even though the rest of the Iliad and the context of Apollo’s speech does not support that evaluation. Dover, *Symposium*, 82, aptly notes: “A Greek citing poetry seldom takes notice of the context in which the words were uttered, by whom, to whom, or (most important of all) for what purpose.”

5 Here I assume that the Good is either to be identified with Beauty or, though distinct from Beauty, to be closely associated with it. White, 149-157, has challenged those who assume that Plato identifies Beauty with the Good. White notes that Diotima does not equate the two in 204e1-3, but substitutes the Good for Beauty to make it easier to get an answer from Socrates. As I argued on page 86, fn. 2, however, White is not entirely on the mark with his criticism. The exchange of Beauty for the Good can be used to argue their identity as well as their distinction. Furthermore, one must grant that Plato is playing on the close connection between Beauty and the Good; if the two terms are not identical, they are at least closely related. The affinity of the two notions was already inherent in the classical idiom of *καλός καγαθός*, the goal of nobility. What Plato intends with that phrase is, to be sure, different from the aristocratic ideal, even as the Platonic Socrates’ concept of the pursuit of Beauty differs from that of his contemporary society. Nonetheless, Plato begins with the current idiom and finds it useful to discover in one man, Agathon, both beauty (as is his attribute) and goodness (as is derived from his name).
like a faint harmony that is not meant to obscure the melody, but rather to supplement and support it.

Thus, one ought not to expect an erotic overtone in every word of the prologue that may be used to describe Eros later in the dialogue. Sometimes the ordinary meaning of a word is so strong in a particular context that it is difficult to let the word have any erotic overtones without doing an injustice to the passage. Even when a word does have an erotic overtone, we must remember that it is merely an overtone, not the full melody of the dialogue.

In the rest of this chapter, we will examine individual words in the prologue that have erotic overtones, especially in the light of the rest of the dialogue. We will divide the discussion into two parts: First, we will examine adjectives associated with Eros, as well as nouns that describe the attributes of Eros; then, we will examine the verbs (and deverbative nouns) which describe the actions of Eros. I have chosen to divide the words into these two groups since it follows the pattern laid down by Socrates and Agathon of first stating the qualities of Eros (as best seen in adjectives) and of then stating the actions and benefits of Eros (as can be best seen in the verbs). I have selected the words below after examining those words in the prologue which appear later in the dialogue. Then, I removed from consideration such words as \( \pi r\phi\eta\nu \) (172a2, 175e6, 213e4), \( \pi x\iota\zeta\o\nu \) (172a4 and 216e4), and \( \alpha\mu\alpha \) (172a4, 173b9 and seventeen times in the rest of

\[6\] I was aided in this endeavor by the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae.*
the dialogue) that have at best a tangential connection to the dialogue's central theme,\(^7\) so that the words discussed below will be the clearest examples of words with philosophical or erotic overtones.

The six adjectives we will examine are καλός, φαύλος, μικρός, ἀθλιος, νέος, and μαλακός. All of them describe attributes that Eros seeks to possess or to avoid. Then we will examine thirteen verbs. Five of the verbs (βουλεσθαί, ζητεῖν, πυνθάνεσθαί, διαπυνθάνεσθαί, and ἀγείν) refer to Eros' longing and search for Beauty. Two verbs

\(^7\)Some words which I have omitted, most notably δίκαιος, may have some significance for the dialogue's exposition of Eros, but are too tangential or insubstantial to justify inclusion in this study. Nonetheless, a case can be made for understanding the word δικαιότατος in 172b5 as a word that echoes ideas raised elsewhere in the dialogue, since the dialogue does concern itself to a fair degree with issues of justice. Eryximachus argues that Eros accomplishes the good with sobriety and justice (δικαιοσύνης, 188d6). Agathon avers that Eros makes the laws just (196c3). Socrates, meanwhile, states that the most beautiful of thoughts that Eros can beget is the concern for the matters of the state, which is called sobriety and justice (209a8). He also argues that by seeking Absolute Beauty, one discovers the beauty of laws, which is a greater beauty than that of bodies (210c2-6).

Given the dialogue's preoccupation with justice, the word δικαιότατος in 172b5 gains new importance. There Glaucon tells Apollodorus, "It would be most fair for you to report the words of your friend." (δικαιότατος γὰρ εἶ τοῦ τοῦ ἐταίρου λόγους ἀπαγγέλειν. On the idiomatic use of δικαιότατος, see Dover, Symposium, 78.) Because Socrates' speech can assist Glaucon in the pursuit of Beauty, Apollodorus is duty-bound to narrate it. Although Apollodorus may not technically be the most proper man (δικαιότατος) to narrate the symposium to Glaucon--he was not present when the dialogue was first told and is relating it years after the event--his acquaintance with Socrates and his circle makes it incumbent upon him to narrate the dialogue. To the degree that he is an erotic being moved by Beauty, he is the proper (just) man to narrate the dialogue.
(δοκεῖν, οἴεσθαι) explain the middle state of Eros, while three describe his ultimate goal (εἰδέναι, καθορᾶν, συνεῖναι). Finally, three verbs describe the way in which Eros-driven men reach their goal (τυγχάνειν, χαρίζεσθαι, and διαφεύγειν).

**Allusions to Eros and Erotic Processes in Adjectives, Adverbs, and Nouns Derived from Adjectives**

**Adjectives of Beauty and its Antonyms**

καλός and its cognates. If Eros is associated with one adjective above all others, it is the word καλός. Whether the guests state that Eros is himself καλός or makes things καλά or seeks after καλόν, they always associate Eros with τὸ καλόν or τὸ κάλλος. Phaedrus argues that the goal of life is to live beautifully or nobly (καλῶς βιώσεσθαι, 178c6), which Eros more than any other force leads one to do (178c7). Pausanias, however, states that nothing is καλόν in itself, but the manner in which something is done determines if it is καλόν or not (181a2). Thus, Pausanias endeavors in his speech to find the Eros that is truly καλός (181a5). Agathon says that Eros is κάλλιστος (195a7-b3), while Socrates states that Eros seeks τὸ καλόν but does not himself possess τὸ κάλλος (200e2-201c5).

How are we to translate καλός? When καλός describes a visible object or person, it usually means “beautiful”; in other contexts, however, καλός can mean “honorable” or “noble.” Because the encomiasts of Eros are largely concerned with human bodies, the most common translation of καλός in the dialogue will be “beautiful.” The other nuances of the word, however, are not to be forgotten. As
Warner aptly notes, "the usual translation, 'beautiful' is too narrow; for the beauty in question can not only be physical but also moral, where a word like 'noble' or 'fine' would be more in place; indeed, the word, can be used in certain contexts even more generally to mean 'admirable' or even 'good'." Moreover, as Dover notes, καλός "expresses a favorable reaction" to a person, object, or idea. "This word, when applied to a person, means 'beautiful', 'pretty', 'handsome', 'attractive', and its antonym is ἄισχρός, 'ugly'. The words are also applied to objects, sights, and sounds and whatever can be heard about and thought about, such as an institution, an achievement or failure, or a virtuous or vicious action." Here καλός means "'admirable', 'credible', 'honorable'" and its antonym ἄισχρός means "'disgraceful', 'repulsive', 'contemptible'." Since the ancient Greeks did not differentiate between the grandeur of beauty, honor, and nobility, the possessor of any of the three was καλός. If we use "beautiful" to describe what the Greeks called καλός, we must remember that a Greek could use aesthetic terms to describe ethical decisions.

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8 Warner, 164.


10 Lexique de Platon, s.v. καλός (277), gives the range of meanings: As an adjective, καλός means "beautiful," whether physically or morally. As a substantive, it can mean "physical beauty," "honor," "moral good or duty," or "the Idea of beauty." Similarly, κάλλος, as Lexique de Platon, 276, notes, can be taken in a physical,
Not surprisingly, the prologue shows as much preoccupation with beauty as the body of the dialogue does. Socrates has become beautiful (οùτω καλός γεγενημένος, 174a5) so that he may go as a handsome man (καλός) to a handsome man (καλόν, 174a9). By having Socrates beautify himself and use the vocabulary of beauty, Plato has already hinted at what a major topic of the dialogue will be, namely, beauty. This is especially made apparent to the reader when Plato states that Socrates rarely preoccupied himself with becoming beautiful, at least not as far as physical hygiene was concerned (174a4).11

It is not, however, solely physical beauty with which the prologue concerns itself: Wisdom, too, is characterized as beautiful. Socrates is the first to hint at this truth, when he with some irony calls Agathon’s wisdom καλή (175e2). Although Socrates can be moral, or metaphysical sense. H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, eds. A Greek English Lexicon, 9d ed., rev. H. Stuart Jones and R. McKenzie, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), s.v. καλός, 870, includes the following definitions: “beautiful, of outward form, freq. of persons;...freq. of parts of the body, fair, shapely;...with ref. to use, good, of fine quality;...of sacrifices, auspicious;...in a moral sense, beautiful, noble, honorable.” Hence “τὸ καλόν, moral beauty, virtue, honor.” The adverb καλῶς is usually translated “well,” not “beautifully,” even though the adjectival form καλός can be translated “good” or “beautiful.” The affinity between the two concepts expressed by καλός can be seen in colloquial English, where “beautiful” can substitute for “good.”

11Friedländer, 3:5, notes that the narration of the symposium begins with a discussion of beauty, much as the Hippias Major, which also is concerned with beauty, begins with the words, “Hippias the beautiful.”
understood merely to be referring to Agathon’s ability to craft beautiful words, this is not Socrates’ point, since he argues in his encomium that ideas themselves can possess καλλος (210b6-c6). By praising the wisdom of Agathon, Socrates has introduced into the dialogue the notion that wisdom may be judged by the criterion of τὸ καλλος.

This notion that wisdom (and thus ethics and discourse) can be judged by the criterion of beauty is carried forth in two other instances in the prologue. Eryximachus, when hearing that the crowd will not overdrink, says that Pausanias has spoken καλῶς (176b2). Later, Socrates states that the goal of the evening’s discourse will be to speak sufficiently and beautifully (ικανῶς καὶ καλῶς; 177e4). Although both occurrences of καλῶς are idiomatic and almost formulaic, they do allude to the beauty desired by Eros: In both cases an act of speaking is judged to be beautiful because of its contents. Pausanias has spoken beautifully because he has urged the virtue of moderation. Similarly, Socrates describes a beautiful encomium as one that covers the material sufficiently.

Although all of these uses of καλος and its cognates can be understood apart from Socrates’ theory of beauty, they receive their full import when understood in the light of the Ascent to Beauty outlined by Socrates. The search for beauty takes place everywhere; even the most unerotic men are always searching for beauty. Although beauty can be found in many items, the beauty discovered by the mind (e.g., wisdom, good laws) is superior to that observed by the senses.
Thus, even the most ordinary uses of καλός in the prologue remind the reader of the quest for Absolute Beauty. Aristodemus, by choosing to come to the symposium, is told that he has acted beautifully (καλῶς...ποιῶν; 174e12). Although that phrase can be understood to mean simply “I’m glad you came,” it does express a philosophical truth: By coming to the symposium, Aristodemus has been guided by and to Beauty: Aristodemus, moved by the same beauty which moved Socrates (cf 174c7), has been led to undertake a noble task, namely, coming to the house where Beauty will be seen. It is not Aristodemus’ crashing of the party in itself that is beautiful, but rather his intention to get a glimpse of Beauty. Though Agathon believes that he is the beauty which moves all his guests to come to the party, Socrates will reveal that there is a higher Beauty. Thus, Agathon’s words mean more than he realizes. In a similar fashion, Agathon’s words εἰς καλῶν ἡκεῖς, “you have come at a beautiful time” (174e5), ring truer than Agathon realizes. Given the evening’s discussion, Aristodemus has come at a more beautiful time than Agathon can know at the time he utters those words.

φαῦλος and its synonyms. To appreciate the Beauty revealed in the dialogue, one must by implication avoid what is “base” or “ugly”. Thus, φαῦλος and its synonyms contrast with the Beauty yearned for by Eros. As Pausanias argues, there are two ways of loving: there is an Eros that loves καλῶς (181a3) and there is a love which base men

12LSJ, s.v. καλῶς 5 (p 870) translates the idiom καλῶς ποιῶν as “rightly, deservedly.”
(φαύλοι, 181b2) employ. Socrates adopts the distinction, but for a different purpose: Whenever Eros finds Absolute Beauty, everything else appears φαύλον (211e4).  

Since the lover seeks to possess Beauty, he is forced to confront whether or not there is any ugliness in himself.  

13 Dover, *Symposium*, 2, notes that the opposite of καλός is generally αἰσχρός. Cf. LSJ, s.v. καλός III 2 (p 870), which cites *Symposium* 183d, where Pausanias distinguishes between καλόν and αἰσχρόν actions. ϕαύλος, in contrast, means “mediocre” or “undistinguished” (Dover, *Symposium*, 82) and can also mean “useless,” ‘bad.’ As such, φαύλος is the opposite of “any favorable evaluative term.” LSJ, s.v. φαύλος (1919-1920) includes the following definitions: “cheap, easy, slight, paltry,...simple, ordinary...but freq. with sense poor indifferent,...mean, common;...inefficient, bad. *Lexique de Platon* (553) defines φαύλος in the following way: “a) (chooses) ‘médiocre, futile’ (adj. et subst. n.); b) (personnes) mauvais méchant (adj. et subst. m.).” *Lexique de Platon* adds that φαύλος can be used as an antonym for ἁγαθός: “ἐν μόνον ἐξειν τοῦτο ἁγαθόν, τάλλα ἐξων...ϕαύλα Ἡ[ippias] m[iner] 372b2” and “πολλάκις μὲν ἁγαθοῦ αὐλητοῦ φαύλος ἀν ἀπέβη, πολλάκις δ’ ἀν φαύλου ἁγαθός Pr. 327c2-3.”  

14 Throughout the dialogue, but especially in Socrates’ speech, the notion of possessing (ἔχειν) beauty is ill-defined. Sometimes it refers to the enjoyment of a beauty outside oneself (sense A), while other times it refers to possession of beauty by one’s own self (sense B). By ignoring the ambiguity of that phrase, Socrates can assert that only those who do not possess beauty seek beauty. Socrates ignores that one could have beauty oneself (sense B) while seeking to enjoy the beauty of another person (sense A). Cf. Anderson, 66. Nussbaum, 177-179, explains the ambiguity by noting that Plato is stating that the lover does not have a particular instance of beauty (i.e., the beloved). Since Plato assumes that “all beauty, qua beauty, is uniform” (Nussbaum, 179), then lack of a beloved’s beauty implies that the lover lacks all beauty. Cf. Allen, 100; Dover, *Symposium*, 136.
prologue, therefore, we discover two men pondering that question. Aristodemus thinks of himself as φαύλος, resembling Menelaus who went to the banquet of his superior brother, Agamemnon (174c7). Likewise, Socrates claims that his wisdom is φαύλη (175e3) and, therefore, he has gone to the house of the brilliant Agathon. Both occurrences of the word φαύλος can be understood in a non-technical sense, but the word also explains the status of both men as erotic beings, that is, people who are φαύλοι but long to be καλοί. Both Socrates and Aristodemus recognize that they do not possess Beauty; thus they call themselves φαύλοι, even though they know of a greater beauty than Agathon does.15

To recognize one's ugliness is a wretched experience, but the truly wretched (ἄθλιοι), according to the prologue, are those who do not recognize their lack of beauty. Hence the adjective ἄθλιος is applied to those people who have not yet undertaken the Ascent to Beauty--first to Apollodorus in his pre-philosophical stage of life (173a2) and then to his friends who pursue business rather than philosophy (173d6). Such people live uninterested in the philosophical life and, consequently, are still in the wretched state in which Eros begins but does not intend to stay. Thus, the reader must

15Cf. Mitchell, 169: "If greatness is to be measured in monuments of stone, law, thought--which is what all our instincts guide us to take for greatness, or beauty, itself--then 'paltry' is the last word on Socrates. And if, in spite of that, we insist on finding some greatness in Socrates, then we must leave aside forever the 'Socratic enigma' and busy ourselves with writing books on 'the philosophy of Socrates'."
distinguish between being φαύλος, where one is far removed from τὸ κάλλος, and being ἄθλιος, a state in which one does not recognize that he is φαύλος.16

In light of the derogatory adjectives applied to those who lack beauty, the adjective σμικρός, which describes Aristodemus (173b2), carries new weight.17 It is not merely a description of his height, but of his intellectual stature and progress on the Ascent to Beauty. For as Socrates portrays the objects of beauty, each new object makes the previous one appear σμικρόν (210b-c).18 Thus, it is significant that the only physical description given of Aristodemus--besides his shoelessness--is that he is σμικρός. It indicates to the reader that Aristodemus, though a pupil of Socrates as his shoelessness indicates, is inferior to his teacher in discerning the greater objects of beauty. Thus, the smallness of Aristodemus’ stature becomes a metaphor for his philosophical stature.

16LSJ, s.v. ἄθλιος, 32, defines the word as “struggling, wretched, miserable,” in both a moral and non-moral sense. Cf. Lexique de Platon s.v. ἄθλιος, 14.

17LSJ s.v. μικρός (1133) observes that μικρός can refer to the size, quantity, or amount of importance given to an object or person. When μικρός is applied to people it can be derogatory, as in Ar. Ran. 709 and Pl. Prt. 323d.

18As Dover, Symposium, 155, aptly translates σμικρόν: “trivial’, ‘of no account’.”
Other Adjectives

veós. The seemingly innocent remark in the prologue about the recentness (νεωστί, 172c1) of the symposium alludes to the questions of youth and age that dominate the dialogue. Glaucon assumes that the symposium must have taken place recently (νεωστί, 172c1), even as Agathon in his speech assumes that Eros must be young (νεός, 195a8-c7).19 Glaucon and Agathon make these assumptions because they do not believe that something old would be of much interest, as the symposium and Eros are. Agathon argues that, since Eros is beautiful, he must be one of the youngest of the gods (195a8-196a1). Likewise, Glaucon assumes that the symposium must have been recent and Apollodorus must be an eyewitness of the symposium if his account is to have any validity; for this reason, Glaucon's first question about the symposium is whether or not Apollodorus was present at it (172b7).

Not every person in the dialogue agrees with the emphasis on youth. Phaedrus states that Eros must be one of the oldest of the gods, because the antiquity of Eros gives him greater honor. His greater age makes him more responsible for all the benefits that befall mankind (178c2). Meanwhile, Socrates steers a middle course between Phaedrus and Agathon. Since Eros is neither beautiful nor ugly, he is neither immortal nor mortal. On the same day he can die and reinvigorate himself (203d8-e3). Thus, he is neither young nor

19As LSJ s.v. νεός observes, the word can have not only the sense of "young," but also that of "youthful."
old, but both. Since he longs for the beautiful, he is old while seeking to be young. Like all lovers, Eros is inspired by the beauty of youth, for only by gazing at beautiful young bodies can a person beget offspring, whether literally or mentally (209b1; 210a5). Pregnancy (of both kinds) is the chief way in which a person is made new again since children and ideas carry on the names of their creators forever. Through begetting (207d3) and regeneration (207d7) Eros makes new what was old (208b1).20

It is this Socratic concept of youth that explains why Glaucon is pleased with Apollodorus’ narration, even though the symposium is not a recent event (i.e., one that had taken place νεωστί, 172c1) and its narrator is not an eyewitness. The symposium has not deteriorated with age because narration has kept it alive and young. Even as all pieces of knowledge are kept eternally alive and retain their youthful vigor through practice (208a4-7), so the symposium is kept alive and young through its continued transmission by narration. Each time the symposium is narrated it replaces the old narration with a newer, fresher one (208a7-b2). Thus, the dialogue is truly “new” or

20Since Socrates places the conception of Eros at Aphrodite’s birthday party, his mythology of the origins of Eros reflects a middle stance between Agathon and Phaedrus. On the one hand, Socrates agrees with Agathon that Eros is not one of the oldest of the gods. His conception takes place after the revolt against Uranus and the ascension of either Cronus or Zeus to the throne of the deities (depending upon whether Socrates is following the Hesiodic or Homeric account of the origin of Aphrodite). On the other hand, Aphrodite is not one of the more recent gods, e.g., Dionysus; thus, Eros cannot be a very recent god, either. Thus, Eros is neither a primeval deity nor one of the more recent gods.
"young," in the sense that Socrates understands the term. Since regeneration is an erotic process, the narration is necessarily a manifestation of Eros.²¹

μαλακός. In a similar way, a "Socratic" understanding of softness explains in what sense Apollodorus can deserve the nickname "softy" (μαλακός, 173d8)²² and in what sense this appellation makes Apollodorus a truly erotic character. As Apollodorus' friends observe, the nickname does not fit his habit of railing against everyone (173d8-10); Apollodorus is usually not a "softy." In Agathon's way of looking at Eros, this would indicate an anti-erotic tendency in Apollodorus: Eros and those possessed by him must be soft, since Eros dwells only in the softest regions of the body and in the softest of people (195e3, 195e7-8). In the Socratic understanding, however, Eros and his followers do not possess "softness" or any of the qualities ascribed to Beauty, but rather long for them or possess them intermittently (203c6-e5): Eros is not supple (ἀπταλός) and beautiful (καλός), but hard (σκληρός), squalid

²¹By examining this one word, we have confirmed the conclusion reached in the second chapter, namely, that narration is a process whereby Eros works in men to obtain a glimpse of Absolute Beauty.

²²The reading μαλακός is to be preferred to μανικός, since the former is the lectio difficilior. As Paganelli, 195-196, notes, μαλακός acquired a vulgar meaning in Byzantine Greek and was, accordingly, amended. When applied to persons, μαλακός can mean "soft" in the sense of "mild" or "gentle" or in the sense of "cowardly," "morally weak," "lacking in self control," as LSJ, 1077, notes.
(αὐχμηρός), shoeless (ἀνυπόδητος), and homeless (ἀοικος); when he finds good fortune, he flourishes; other times, he dies, but always to come back alive. To the degree that Apollodorus has a softer and a harsher side, he illustrates the position of the lover, not the possessor, of beauty.

Allusions to Eros and Erotic Processes in Verbs and Deverbative Nouns

Eros' Quest

βούλεσθαι. Since Eros implies desire, the dialogue often uses βούλεσθαι as a synonym for ἐρᾶν. This interchange of terms is most strikingly illustrated by Socrates in 199e6-200e6, where ἐπιθύμειν and βούλεσθαι are used as synonyms for the verb ἐρᾶν, to avoid using the definiendum in the definition. The three verbs differ from one another, to be sure, but in quantity or intensity, not quality: βούλεσθαι and ἐπιθύμειν denote less intense longings than ἐρᾶν.

Thus, βούλεσθαι ought to be treated as a loose equivalent to ἐρᾶν, even when it occurs in the prologue. Significantly, the four times that this word is used in the prologue it establishes a choice among

23 Similarly, Aristophanes in defining Eros says that the split halves always desire (βούλονται) to spend time with one another (192c4) and want (βούλεσθε) to be united or forged together (192d4).

24 LSJ, 325, translates βούλομαι inter alia as “will,” “wish,” “like” and ἐπιθυμέω (p 634) “set one’s heart upon a thing, long for, covet, desire.” Dover, Symposium, 135, cites Lysis 207de as evidence for the interchangeability of βούλεσθαι and ἐπιθυμεῖν. See also Allen, 56.
various objects of desire. The men who want to indulge in drink are allowed to do so (176e5) and the flute girl can play to whomever she wants (176e7); but the desires of neither group will influence the behavior of the rest of the assembly. They, instead, will be willing, i.e., will desire, to pass the time through words about Eros (176e9; 177a1).

ζήτειν. Because Eros does not possess what he desires, he must constantly seek it. Thus, ζήτειν (seeking)\textsuperscript{25} is an important erotic action, even if the guests at the symposium do not agree on the object of Eros' search. According to Aristophanes, Eros makes one seek one's other half, both when people were first split in half (191b3) and now (191d5). Diotima, however, avers that men do not seek their other halves (205e1), but Eros makes men seek κατὰ τὸ δυνατὸν ἀεὶ τε εἶναι καὶ ἀθάνατος (207d1). Therefore, men seek beauty in order that they might beget in beauty (209b2). If a lover is noble enough to love the beauty of the soul, he will be content to seek beautiful words, ideas, and souls rather than beautiful bodies (210c2). Since Eros seeks Absolute Beauty above all, Socrates' Ascent to Beauty is aptly described as his standing still while seeking (ζήτων, 210c5).

In the prologue the verb ζήτειν occurs twice: Glaucon seeks Apollodorus (172a7) and Agathon has sought Aristodemus the previous day (174e7). In the first case, Glaucon seeks Apollodorus

\textsuperscript{25}“Seeking” is the root meaning of the word, but it can bear a number of connotations: “search after, search out,” “inquire into, investigate,” “seek after, desire,” as LSJ s.v. ζήτεω, 756, notes.
not because Apollodorus is beautiful but because he knows words that lead to Beauty. Agathon, meanwhile, in searching for Aristodemus, is seeking his object of beauty, namely, the flattery of a crowd. In both instances the search is an erotic one, since both men are looking for the object they desire most.

πυθάνεσθαι and διαπυθάνεσθαι. Apollodorus’ interlocutor (172a1), as well as Glaucon (172a7) inquires about the dialogue (πυθάνεσθαι and διαπυθάνεσθαι,26 respectively). In 204e2, the only other place in the dialogue that πυθάνεσθαι occurs, Plato uses it to refer to a philosophical inquiry; the question Socrates asks there pertains directly to Eros—namely, what the goal of Eros is. Like all philosophical questions, it is erotic, that is, a form of seeking after the beauty of truth. Likewise, the queries in the prologue are asked because of Eros’ influence on the questioners. They long for the beauty of the dialogue and the Absolute Beauty portrayed therein. The force of Eros behind the inquiry is especially underscored by Glaucon’s use of three verbs together, all of which are associated with Eros: ἐξήτουν βουλόμενος διαπυθάνεσθαι (172a7). Glaucon wants (βουλόμενος) something, which made him inquire (διαπυθάνεσθαι) and to search (ἐξήτουν) for the person who could answer those queries.

ἀγείν. In Diotima’s Ascent to Beauty, the pursuit of Absolute Beauty is sometimes seen as an activity performed in isolation and

26Dover, Symposium, 77, observes that the thoroughness of the inquiry is seen not only in the δια- prefix but in the aorist tense as well. He translates the verb “to get the whole story.”
other times as an endeavor undertaken with the help of another person. Thus, the Ascent to Beauty is sometimes described as if the individual progressed to Absolute Beauty in isolation (ιέναι ἐπὶ τὸ πρᾶγμα, 210a5-6), other times as if he must be led by another to Beauty (πρὸς τὰ ἐρωτικὰ παιδαγωγηθῆ, 210e2; ἐὰν ὄρθως ἦγηται ὁ ἡγοὺμενος, 210a6-7), and still other times as if he can reach Beauty only by leading another person to it (i.e., by adopting a beloved and discussing beautiful matters with him: ἐνὸς αὐτὸν σώματος ἔραν καὶ ἐνταῦθα γεννᾶν λόγους καλοὺς, 210a7-8). As 210a6-8 reveals, a lover can apparently have both an ἡγοὺμενος and ἐρωμενος. The ἡγοὺμενος instructs him in matters of Eros, which he puts into practice with his ἐρωμενος.27 Thus, the Ascent to Beauty can be undertaken in isolation or with the help of another: τὸ τὸ γὰρ δὴ ἕστι τὸ ὄρθως ἐπὶ τὰ ἐρωτικὰ ιέναι ὑπ’ ἀλλοῦ ἁγεσθαι (211b7-c1).

Both possibilities are demonstrated in the prologue. Socrates leads Aristodemus to Agathon, who with his good looks exemplifies an aspect of Beauty (174c8). The prologue also shows Socrates pursuing Absolute Beauty by standing alone in contemplation on a nearby porch. He forgets that he was leading Aristodemus; in fact,

27 Dover, Symposium, 155, resolves the tension between the seeker of Beauty as lover and beloved by implying that at the beginning of the ascent the man is the ἐρωμενος, but in the later stages of the ascent, the ἐράστης. This is not entirely an adequate explanation, since even the young man is a lover, who pursues beautiful bodies (210a6-7). See Anderson, 61, and the discussion in the previous chapter, 119, fn. 52.
Socrates himself must be led into Agathon’s house by Aristodemus (174e8) and a servant (175a3).

Hence the prologue reveals to us that, no matter how erotic a process leading another to beauty is, the final steps to Absolute Beauty must be taken in isolation. The prologue, thus, confirms two impressions Diotima gives in her outline of the Ascent to Beauty. First, Diotima’s doubt that Socrates would be able to grasp τὰ τέλεα καὶ ἐποπτικά (210a1) is not meant to insult his intelligence—even though she has reproved him throughout her discourse for holding erroneous ideas. Rather, she recognizes that she can instruct him only so far in Eros and Beauty. He must discern for himself the Beauty beyond the beauty of bodies, laws, and thoughts. Whether or not he will succeed is beyond her ability to predict. Second, the prologue confirms the impression that Diotima has intentionally omitted any mention of another person’s presence at the sight of Absolute Beauty. Although a man may discuss beautiful ideas with his beloved or use the beauty of his beloved to spur himself to a higher beauty, the vision of Absolute Beauty cannot be shared since it cannot be described as the beauty of gold or clothes can (211d3-5). Leading another person to Beauty is an erotic activity, but the true lover of Beauty cannot lead a pupil or beloved to the last stage of his quest.

Eros’ Middle State

δοκεῖν. To illustrate the middle state in which Eros exists, Diotima uses the analogy of δόξα in the realm of knowledge. Δόξα or
τὸ ὀρθὰ δοξάζειν καὶ ἄνευ τοῦ ἔχειν λόγον δοῦναι (202a5) is not the same as ignorance or knowledge. Knowledge requires that a person be able to give an account of how he knows what he knows. Yet a person who knows something that is true, but cannot explain why it is true, still knows something. He cannot be described as ignorant. Thus, the realm of seeming and supposing (δόξα) is a middle state between ignorance (ἀμαθία) and wisdom (σοφία or ἐπιστήμη). Like all people in the middle state, a possessor of δόξα can be spurred on to attain the higher level, in this case, to proceed from a right opinion to knowledge.28

To the experienced reader of the Symposium, then, the opening sentence, Δοκῶ μοι περὶ δὲν πυνθάνεσθε οὐκ ἀμελεττός εἶναι (172a1-2) is pregnant with meaning. As we have already seen, making an inquiry is a process associated with Eros, since it is through a search inspired by Beauty that one can raise an item of the middle state (δόξα) to the higher level (ἐπιστήμη). Likewise, practice (μελέταν, reflected in the adjective ἀμελεττός in 172a1) is an act of Eros, since it is through practice that one retains knowledge (208a4-5). Only through practice does a daemonic person, that is, a person

28 As LSJ s.v. δοκέω, 442, notes, the root meaning of δοκέω is “expect,” as its etymology reveals. It is the iterative of δέκομαι (cf. δἐχομαι). From this it derives two primary meanings: “think, suppose, imagine” and “seem.” Similarly, δόξα has the primary meaning of “expectation,” from which “notion, opinion, judgment” (LSJ, 444) is derived. Cf. Lexique de Platon, s.v. δοκεῖν and δόξα, 143-146.
in the middle state, ascend to the higher realm, since the force of forgetfulness drives out knowledge almost as quickly as he has acquired it. To add to the erotic overtones of πυνθάνεσθε and ἀμελέτητος, the sentence begins with δοκῶ. Specifically, this word reminds the reader of the intermediate character of the dialogue: The dialogue may lead to knowledge, since it describes how one is to pursue Beauty, but the dialogue is not itself Beauty. Thus, Plato shows the intermediate nature of the dialogue by casting aspersions upon its narrator: Apollodorus seems to be a competent narrator, but we cannot be certain that he actually is.29

This doubt raised in the prologue’s first sentence is underscored by its last sentence. There Apollodorus states that he will narrate those items that seem most memorable to him (ἀ δὲ μάλιστα καὶ ἐδοξέ μοι ἀξιομημόνευτον, 178a3); whether or not in fact they are cannot be determined. Though one could argue on this basis that the dialogue is untrustworthy, the reader ought to be encouraged by the fact that an opinion (δοξα) is by definition correct, even though the holder of it can give no explanation for its correctness. Thus, Aristodemus may indeed have chosen the most noteworthy speeches, but may not understand why that is the case.30

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29 *Lexique de Platon*, 143, defines δοξείν in this sense as “paraître’ (par opposition a ‘être’).”

30 There are other times δοξείν appears in the prologue (173b4, 174d5, 175b4, 176g5, 176e5, 177g4, 177g7, 177d1 [συνδοξείν], 177d2), but the word does not allude to the more philosophical sense as found in these two passages. As we examine the philosophical or
Closely related to the notion of opinion and appearance (δόξα) is that of supposing (οἰσθαλή). Suppositions are not necessarily false. They can serve as the point of departure for acquiring knowledge (207a6). They can be the source for δόξα and, thus, the impetus to turn the δόξα into knowledge. Sometimes men are absolutely correct in their suppositions. The supposition that one has a lack, for example, leads one (rightly) to seek to fill that lack (204a6-7). Moreover, men beget children on the supposition that they are creating for themselves immortality, eternal memory, and happiness (208e5); in truth, they are, according to Diotima. In this vein, Diotima asks Socrates to speculate on the bliss of seeing Absolute Beauty; since Socrates has not yet seen Absolute Beauty, she asks if Socrates supposes that her description is true, (211d8; e4). Since the dialogue as a whole presumes that Diotima’s description is correct, Socrates would be right to make the supposition Diotima asks him to make.

Nonetheless, a few of the suppositions made by the characters in the body of the dialogue and all of the suppositions in the prologue are wrong; in this respect, a supposition is lower than a true opinion (δόξα), which by definition is true. When Socrates is ignorant about the middle state, he supposes that Eros must be beautiful since the

erogetic uses of common words, we are not arguing that every occurrence of a word sometimes used philosophically must have a philosophical or erotic meaning in the prologue. Rather, we are arguing that there are several words and phrases that have overtones of the philosophical and erotic when they are read in light of the entire dialogue.
only two possibilities are for Eros to be beautiful or ugly (201e10); his supposition is wrong. Mere supposition lies behind the misconceptions of Socrates and others, like Agathon, who believe that Eros is supple and beautiful (203c7) and loves beauty rather than begets in beauty (206e3). In the prologue, Apollodorus supposed that he was doing too many important activities to be bothered by philosophy, but he has since learned that he was mistaken (173a1-2). His friends make the same suppositions about Apollodorus that he once wrongly made about philosophy, namely, that philosophy makes one a wretch (173d2). Yet, though Apollodorus supposes (οἴομαί) that his friends are correct in their criticism of him, he knows (οἴδα) that he is correct in his criticism of them (173d2-3). Thus, although suppositions are sometimes true in the body of the dialogue, they are always false in the prologue.

Why is this the case? If a supposition can be a form of opining and opining can lead to knowledge, why does the prologue view all its suppositions in a negative light? The answer is that a supposition can be a manifestation of ignorance rather than an intuitive apprehension of knowledge. If one is to make any progress in ascending to Beauty, one must not equate any and every supposition (οἴσεσθαί) with right opinion (δόξα). For, as Socrates has discovered with the help of Diotima, there are many suppositions about Eros that are wrong.

Nonetheless, since supposition and opinion characterize people in a daemonic (middle) state, the suppositions and opinions of the characters of the prologue demonstrate how akin to Eros they are.
Apollodorus, for example, states that he supposed that he ought to pursue everything but philosophy (173a1-2). Apollodorus was wrong in supposing that philosophy had nothing to offer him, but Apollodorus’ search for something that would bring meaning to his life was not wrong. Indeed, it demonstrated to him a truth, namely, that he had to pursue something. His supposition erred only in that it excluded philosophy as a worthy pursuit.

Eros’ Goal

εἰδέναι. As we have observed, a person who has acquired knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) has arrived at the goal sought by Eros and all daemonic beings; a person who has a mere opinion (δόξα) is still in the state between ignorance and knowledge. Therefore, the reader would do well to consider which characters in the prologue are said to know something and what sort of knowledge they possess. The reader would also do well to consider the truth of anyone’s claim to knowledge. In this way, the reader will determine how to pursue the knowledge that is associated with Absolute Beauty.

Apollodorus is presented as the expert in the prologue. Glaucon says that, while his friend was unable to say anything clear about the dialogue (οὐδὲν ἔχε σαφὲς λέγειν, 172b4-5), Apollodorus

31 Strictly speaking, Plato does not use εἰδέναι to describe the knowledge of Absolute Beauty. Plato does use, however, a wide variety of synonyms rather than any one particular word: σοφία (202a3), ἐπιστήμη (202a6), ἐπιστήμη (202a7), φρόνησις (202a9), and μάθημα (211c7). See fn. 2 in this chapter.
knows (σὲ εἰδὲναί, 172b4) the contents of the dialogue. To the extent that Apollodorus has mastered the dialogue, he has apprehended Beauty. Glaucon turns to him to acquire knowledge about the dialogue because he is searching for Beauty, whether or not he is conscious of this desire.

In turn, Apollodorus' goal is to know (εἰδέναί) everything that Socrates does (172c6). Since Socrates is the perfect manifestation of the erotic life, knowing Socrates leads to knowledge of Absolute Beauty. That perception of true Beauty leads one to understand the worth of various pursuits. Hence, Apollodorus knows for a fact (οἶδα) that his friends are κακαδαίμονες (1723d3-4). His friends may think (ἡγεῖσθε, 173d1) that he is wretched--as people who have not yet ascended to Absolute Beauty they cannot know his condition for certain--but Apollodorus knows for a fact the wretchedness of his friends.

καθορὰν. Although Absolute Beauty is not the sort that can be seen through human eyes, the metaphor of sight is most appropriate, nonetheless, since it is through the eyes that most knowledge is apprehended.32 It is also a fitting metaphor because beauty is commonly thought of in physical terms. Thus, Socrates states that the true lover's goal is to catch sight of (κατιδῆ) the one ἐπιστήμη which is of Beauty (210d7). Once a lover has glimpsed Absolute Beauty, he does not wish to observe anything else (211b6; e4).

32As LSJ s.v. εἶδω, 483, notes, οἶδα is the perfect of the aorist εἶδον, the present εἶδω being defective and replaced by ὅραω.
The observation of Beauty, however, must be more than mere sight of it. As Anderson has noted, the Eleusinian Mysteries required the initiate to do more than view the ear of grain and the other ἐπιστήματα. He had to understand the significance of each object that was shown. In the same way, the initiates into the mysteries of Eros must not only view Absolute Beauty but be able to comprehend it.33

The metaphor of sight for apprehension of Beauty clarifies the beginning of the prologue when Glaucon catches sight of Apollodorus (172a3). Even as the lover is overjoyed to catch sight of Absolute Beauty, so Glaucon delights in catching a glimpse of Apollodorus. Since Apollodorus will narrate the dialogue to him, Glaucon has in

33Anderson, 59. Anderson adds that Diotima works herself into a corner with her argument. Although she has distinguished δόξα from ἐπιστήμη by saying that the latter is the former with an explanation, she herself cannot explain the Ascent to Beauty to Socrates (210a1-2). Socrates, in turn, is convinced of the truth of the argument (212b2: πεπεισμένος), but does not argue why it must be so. Thus, argues Anderson, Socrates espouses a view of Eros and Beauty that may be correct but cannot be proved with the certainty demanded of ἐπιστήμη. Anderson’s point is well taken, but he overlooks how rarely in Plato’s dialogues the character Socrates puts the formula of ἐπιστήμη = δόξα + τὸ ἔχειν λόγον δούναι into practice. It is a convenient formula to trip up opponents, but not always one he attempts to use for himself. Moreover, Socrates recognizes the slipperiness of his own knowledge. He tells Agathon in the prologue (175e2-4) that his own wisdom is fleeting and mediocre. Though Socrates understands the value of the sight of Absolute Beauty, he also knows that mortals are permitted only a passing glance at it. Although sight of such beauty—even with understanding—is as great an apprehension of knowledge as mankind is permitted, it certainly fails to measure up to the absolute knowledge implied by Socrates’ formula for ἐπιστήμη.
effect caught a glimpse of Absolute Beauty itself when he espies Apollodorus. For through Apollodorus, Glaucon—and the reader—is instructed how to pursue Absolute Beauty.

συνεϊναι and its cognate συνουσία. Apollodorus and Glaucon regularly refer to the symposium as a “gathering” (συνουσία): 172a7, b7, c1; 173a4, b3. Eryximachus, likewise, uses συνουσία (176e2) and ήμας δὲ διὰ λόγων ἀλλήλοις συνεϊναι τὸ τήμερον (176e8-9) to describe the symposium. Ironically, the term συμπόσιον does not appear in the dialogue, except in the title.

The word συνουσία, however, can refer to sex as well as to a gathering of people, much as the English “intercourse” can refer either to sex or to conversation.34 In fact, in the body of the dialogue συνουσία is used several times to refer to sexual intercourse: 191c7 and 192c5 (ἡ τῶν ἀφροδισίων συνουσία) in Aristophanes’ speech; 206c6 (ἡ γὰρ ἀνδρὸς καὶ γυναικὸς συνουσία τόκος ἐστὶν) in Socrates’ speech. In this light, συνεϊναι and συνουσία in the prologue receive new meaning. These words refer to an “intercourse” that is erotic in nature, albeit not in a physical way. The erotic tone of these words reinforces the Socratic notion that the search for noble ideas

34Cf. LSJ s.v. συνουσία I 1 and I 4 (p 1723) and s.v. σύνειμι II 2 and II 3 (p 1705). Cf. also Lexique de Platon s.v. συνουσία 3c (p. 486) and s.v. συνεϊναι 3 (p 481). The Oxford English Dictionary, 7:1094, defines intercourse in its primary meanings as “communication to and fro between countries” and “social communication between individuals; frequent and habitual contact in conversation and action.” Under the latter definition is included “sexual connexion.”
and, above all, Absolute Beauty is one undertaken by Eros and by those under his sway.

Eros’ Method

τυγχάνειν and its cognate ἐντυγχάνειν. The goal of Eros is ultimately to obtain what he desires. Thus, the verbs τυγχάνειν and ἐντυγχάνειν are often used in the dialogue to refer to the completion of the erotic process. Eryximachus argues that the seasons change because warm and cold acquire a longing for each other (πρὸς ἀλληλα τοῦ κοσμίου τύχη ἔρωτος, 188a2-3). Agathon speaks of Eros encountering (ἐντύχη, 195e6) souls of all kinds, but then withdrawing from the unlovely ones.35 Aristophanes argues that Eros leads mankind to obtain (τύχωμεν, 193b1) the good things men desire most. In particular, this means searching for and encountering a person of the same gender as one’s other half used to be (191b4, c5; 193c5, c7). Those who end their erotic quest by meeting (ἐντύχη) their other half are particularly fortunate (192b5-c2; cf. 192e5; 193c1). Although Socrates denies Eros leads one to strive to meet one’s other half (τυγχάνη; 205e2), he does believe that Eros attempts to meet the object of its desire: A lover who encounters (ἐντύχη) a noble soul soon begets noble ideas with him (209b6-c2).36 Because Socrates

35 Socrates picks up on this statement of Agathon, when he speaks of Agathon meeting sensible men and the senseless crowd (194c2-6).

36 Similarly, δῶξα in a sense stumbles upon (τυγχανον) the truth and so avoids the charge of ignorance (202a8).
so exemplifies this pursuit of Absolute Beauty, he is like no other man that Alcibiades has ever met (ἐντετυχήκοτα ἀνθρώπῳ τοιούτῳ οἷῳ ἐγὼ οὐκ ἄν φιλην ποτ’ ἐντύχειν; 219d5-6).

Τυγχάνειν and ἐντυγχάνειν are derived from the noun τύχη, i.e., “fortune,” “fate,” or “chance.” Hence τυγχάνειν has as its root meaning “happen to be”; from this arises the secondary meaning of “gain one’s end or purpose, succeed.” Even the latter often has the connotation of chance, being translated, “hit upon, light upon.”37 Similarly, ἐντυγχάνειν has the root meaning “light upon.”38 At first glance, then, these words seem inappropriate to describe the lover’s actualization of Beauty. Since the lover intentionally pursues Beauty, he can hardly be said to obtain it or come across it by accident. Nonetheless, there is something “accidental” about the acquisition of beauty, especially Absolute Beauty. One can pursue it, but it does not always manifest itself to the beholder. One can be misled in his pursuit into thinking that true beauty is found in one’s other half (as Aristophanes believes) or in youth (as Agathon believes). Even if one avoids these pitfalls, there is no guarantee of success. Diotima doubts that Socrates will be able to reach the goal of the Ascent to Beauty (210a1-2). Although she has described Eros’ nature and origin, his role in procreation, and his relationship to the Good and

37The definitions are taken from LSJ s.v. τυγχάνω, 1832-1833.

38LSJ s.v. ἐντυγχάνω, 578.
immortality, she treats these matters as mere preface to the real truth about Eros.

The ephemeral nature of the encounter with Absolute Beauty is illustrated by Socrates' behavior in the prologue. He stands in deep thought on the porch of Agathon’s neighbor because he has gained a glimpse of Absolute Beauty. Although this glimpse interferes with his previous commitment to attend the banquet, Socrates cannot help pursuing this glimpse of Absolute Beauty for as long as it reveals itself to him. Aristodemus describes this process from an outsider’s point of view: Socrates stands alone wherever he chances to stand (ἐνίοτε ἀποστάς ὃποι ἀν τύχῃ ἔστηκεν, 175b2) when he goes into deep thought. In reality, it is the sight of Absolute Beauty, not Socrates, which is erratic in appearing and disappearing at will; Socrates, as a pursuer of this Beauty, is no more erratic in standing alone in deep thought than Absolute Beauty is in revealing itself.

If Absolute Beauty is all too often perceived for a brief moment, as chance dictates, lower forms of beauty are even more fleeting. Thus, Apollodorus describes his life before his conversion to philosophy as one of wandering aimlessly, wherever he chanced to go (περιτρέχων ὃπῃ τύχωμι, 173a1). He had no specific direction to life, since he had a poor understanding of the proper object of desire. When he met Socrates, however, he at least had the benefit

39Cf. Pausanias' statement about Pandemic Eros in 181a7-b1: Ὁ μὲν οὖν τῆς Ἀφροδίτης ἀληθῶς πάνδημός ἐστι καὶ ἔξεργάζεται ὅτι ἀν τύχη.
of direction in his search for beauty. He may not have apprehended Absolute Beauty, but at least he had begun to understand where it was to be found.

Eros, then, does not always possess Beauty, but if it is fortunate, it may chance upon it. This truth is reinforced by two other incidents in the prologue where the terminology of "encounter" refers to a lover's acquisition of beauty. Aristodemus meets (ἐντυχεῖν) Socrates washed up and wearing shoes (174a3). Aristodemus, the chief lover (ἐρώτης, 173b3) of Socrates, chances upon the object of his desire--one exhibiting a beauty he has rarely seen before. Phaedrus, too, encounters (ἐνέτυχον, 177b5) the object of his desire, namely, a book of a wise man.40 Thus, in the prologue, too, the verbs τυγχάνειν and ἐντυγχάνειν allude to the fulfillment of erotic desire.41

χαρίζεσθαι and its antonym διαφεύγειν. The verb χαρίζεσθαι can refer to the way in which Eros arrives at his goal: He receives some sort of gratification, where he receives the fulfillment of his desire. χαρίζεσθαι can refer to any kind of gratification, whether sexual, physical, emotional, or intellectual.42 Eryximachus uses the word always in a non-sexual sense (186b9, c3-4; 187d6; 188c4),

40See pages 94-96.

41The occurrences of ἔτυγχανον in 172a1, 175c6, 195a3, 199b5, 206b3, 218d8, and 221a1 are outside our consideration, since they are used with supplementary participles in an idiomatic meaning.

42LSJ s.v. χαρίζω, 1978.
while Pausanias (e.g., 183d7; 184d3-4, e4; 185a1-6; 185b5) and Alcibiades (217a4; 218c10, d4-5) always use the word to refer to sexual gratification only.

In his speech, Pausanias distinguishes between a base Eros and a noble Eros (180c4-e1). It is shameful to gratify (χαριζεσθαι) the lover moved by the former, but not the lover moved by the latter (183e6-184a1). Therefore, the wise ἐρωμενος will gratify the noble lover and flee from the base lover. To assist the ἐρωμενος in discerning whom to gratify, Pausanias examines the laws of various states on gratification (182a7-184a2) and gives criteria to distinguish noble and base lovers. Socrates accepts and elaborates on Pausanias' distinction, without using the terminology of Pausanias (i.e., χαριζεσθαι and διαφευγειν). He enumerates several objects of desire, some nobler, some baser (208c1-209e4; 211c1-d1). Though he grants that the lovers of beautiful bodies are true lovers (205d1-8), he urges the true lover to pursue the Beauty far above bodies, clothes, and other objects (211d3-e4). Thus, Socrates, without using the word "gratify," distinguishes between the objects of beauty to be indulged in and those to be avoided.

The prologue underscores the true type of desire that is to be gratified. The verb gratify (χαριζεσθαι) occurs only once there, but in a significant place: Eryximachus states that he wants to gratify Phaedrus by having the guests offer encomia to Eros (177c6). The

43To be specific, Pausanias uses χαριζεσθαι in 182a3, b3, d1; 183d7, 184d3-4, e4; 185a1-6, b5.
speeches of the dialogue are erotic gratification. Indeed, they are the only sort of gratification that Eryximachus finds acceptable; he has already dismissed the flute girl and put restrictions on the consumption of wine. Socrates, of course, consents to Eryximachus' suggestion and thereby suggests that gratification, _contra_ Pausanias, need not be sexual.

The opposite of _χαρίζοισθαι_ in Pausanias' speech is _διαφεύγειν_ (184a2). Thus, when Socrates fled (_διέφυγον_, 174a7) the crowd at the victory party the day before, he was fleeing from the false desire that enthralled Agathon. Even as noble Eros or desire pursues beauty through encomia, so base desire pursues it through drunkenness and indulgence, as took place at Agathon's first party. And this, above all else, must be avoided by the true lover.

**Conclusion**

It should not be surprising that in a dialogue devoted to Beauty and its acquisition there will be words in its introduction that hint at the themes to follow. The presence of these words in the prologue affirms Socrates' thesis that Eros is a universal force. Even if we grant that each allusion to Eros in the prologue may be somewhat insignificant in itself, it gains in significance, when it is considered with other allusions to Eros. The whole of the vocabulary becomes greater than the sum of its parts.

Each word with erotic overtones further supports the notion that the drama of the prologue is philosophical and erotic. The drama is
not meant merely as material to charm the non-philosophically minded reader into reading the dialogue. Instead, the prologue demonstrates that the discourse about Eros is not far removed from the affairs of ordinary life. Even as Socrates avers that Eros is to be found in different forms throughout human experience, the prologue demonstrates that Eros is a universal force. Eros' work is seen as the characters in the prologue talk about beauty and ugliness, about searching, inquiring, opining, gratifying, and a host of other activities. Although not everything called beautiful in the prologue is truly beautiful and not every activity associated with Eros is a fit pursuit of Absolute Beauty, the pervasive vocabulary of Eros in the prologue affirms that all men are lovers. Therefore, the dialogue is of interest to all readers; all can benefit from analyzing their definitions of erotic terms, as they compare their terminology of Eros with that of the characters of the dialogue.
CHAPTER FIVE
EROS AT THE SYMPOSIUM:
THE PROLOGUE AND THE EPILOGUE

In the previous three chapters we examined how certain elements of the prologue dramatize or hint at the influence of Eros: In the second chapter we saw that Apollodorus' narration of the dialogue is an Eros-driven activity, which despite all the weaknesses inherent in Eros leads the reader to Beauty; in the third chapter we saw that each of the characters in the prologue act erotically; in the fourth chapter we saw that the prologue is filled with words that resonate with the vocabulary of Eros. By now the reader of Plato's Symposium ought to have come to expect that even the most seemingly ordinary events and characters of the dialogue are influenced by Eros.

We ought not to be surprised, therefore, to find that the symposium itself, that is, Agathon's banquet, is an exercise in erotics. Ancient symposia by their nature were erotic events, where flute-girls charmed the guests and homosexual love was rampant.\(^1\) Moreover, if we adopt the broader definitions of Eros employed by Socrates,


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even Agathon's symposium, where there is little indulgence in sensual pleasure, is erotic.

Its eroticism is best seen by analyzing the prologue in light of the epilogue, since these two parts of the dialogue contain the most information about the setting of the symposium. The epilogue is the last portion of the dialogue, comprising 212c4-223d12. (The term epilogue, like prologue, is drawn from tragedy; it refers to the last portion of a work.) The prologue and epilogue are distinguished from the body of the dialogue in that they are not part of the series of speeches praising Eros, but descriptions of events preceding and following the encomia. Thus, the epilogue begins where Socrates' speech ends, even as the prologue ends where Phaedrus' speech begins. Although the epilogue does include a speech, namely, Alcibiades' encomium of Socrates, the subject matter is sufficiently different to distinguish it from the speeches that make up the body of the dialogue. Alcibiades' speech praises a man, not a god, and contains more drama than the speeches in the body of the dialogue. Thus, it does not belong with the other six encomia, but marks the beginning of the epilogue.

The epilogue consists of two parts: Alcibiades' encomium of Socrates (212c4-222b7) and the break-up of the symposium (222c1-223d12). It combines speech and drama. The speech, however, is not merely abstract talk. It is full of drama, while underscoring the

2 Mitchell, 215-216, recognizing this, has characterized Alcibiades' speech as a "satyr-play." The encomium form is kept, but the object of the encomium has been changed.
philosophical significance of the dramatic action of the dialogue--including the prologue. For although the speech ostensibly narrates the behavior of Socrates, it is also a drama of Eros at work in one individual. The qualities that Alcibiades describes as being present in Socrates are precisely those Socrates describes as being present in Eros.³

Alcibiades’ encomium of Socrates is without doubt one of the most dramatic of the speeches in the dialogue. No other speaker, with the possible exception of Socrates, discusses to such a degree the actions of the one lauded without lapsing into a list of his benefits to mankind. Unwittingly following the pattern laid down by Socrates in his encomium of Eros, Alcibiades is content to give a simple narration of some characteristic events in the life of Socrates.⁴ Alcibiades does so without making overt philosophical statements about the gods, human nature, passion, sexuality, and the like, as Socrates does. Because of his intoxication, he is capable of little more than an “honest” narration of select facts (215a2-3, d6-e1; 217e1-6).⁵

³Alcibiades is a self-professed expert on Eros; as Plutarch’s Vit. Alc. 16.2 reveals, Alcibiades had an emblem of Eros with a thunderbolt on his shield. Cf. Bury, lii, lx.


⁵Alcibiades’ speech also receives greater weight because his arrival is foretold in the prologue (172b1), but delayed until the epilogue. See Friedländer, 3:4; Warner, 162.
Alcibiades’ speech, however, is as much a philosophical evaluation of Eros as the other encomia are. Like the encomiasts of Eros, Alcibiades cannot help drawing moral conclusions from the behavior of the man he praises. In fact, the deeds Alcibiades recounts have been selected to prove his thesis that Socrates is a hubristic lover and, thus, a person who cannot expound a cogent theory of love. As Nussbaum has noted, Alcibiades’ speech is a refutation of Socrates’ abstract Eros and a plea for love of individuals. Alcibiades refutes Socrates by being the one to appear suddenly (εξαίφνης), whereas Socrates had stated in his speech that Absolute Beauty appears suddenly. Alcibiades is no Absolute Beauty or even a lover of it. He loves particular instances of beauty, not the “universal Good.” He is, in fact, the opposite of Socrates' Eros and Absolute Beauty. Thus, Alcibiades’ speech necessarily enters the realm of philosophy; it does not merely recount the actions of a particular man,

6Cf. the weight his speech has received from scholars, as Krischer, 51-53, observes. Nussbaum, 186, calls Alcibiades’ a defender of the traditional Greek education through poetry, with its emphasis on the particular, not the abstract; thus, Alcibiades conscientiously rejects philosophy and prefers to use images and metaphors in his speech, which are inferior forms of education according to Republic 7. Nussbaum is correct, provided that we understand that a deliberate rejection of philosophy is also a philosophical position.

7As Diodorus Siculus, 12.68.3-5, observes, every party of the Athenians saw in Alcibiades the characteristics they were looking for, so much that slaves and free alike vied to be in his presence.
but demands that Alcibiades’ view of love be deemed the proper one and Socrates’ philosophy of Eros rejected.⁸

Alcibiades’ speech reinforces the notion that philosophical discourse and dramatic action are not so far removed from one another as one might think. Because behavior reflects ethical, ontological, and sometimes epistemological presuppositions, dramatic action is necessarily philosophical. Since Socrates’ behavior reflects his views of Eros, his actions as outlined by Alcibiades must have philosophical significance. Furthermore, Alcibiades’ criticism of Socrates’ behavior necessarily becomes a critique of Socrates’ philosophy. Thus, even though Alcibiades’ speech is not overtly philosophical, as those of other guests are, it nonetheless is an integral part of the philosophical discussion in the dialogue. To the degree that it evaluates Socrates’ philosophy of Eros, it serves as commentary on the key philosophical exposition of the dialogue.

⁸Nussbaum, 184-185; Cf. Rosen, 279-280. Wolz, 349-351, argues that Alcibiades’ speech serves the same function as the myth of Er. Both passages demonstrate that the philosophical system espoused in their dialogues is not without its problems. In the Republic, Er saw a man with the best possible education in virtue choosing his next life foolishly. In the Symposium, Alcibiades demonstrates that, to retain self-identity and the power to choose, a human being would have to resist the sight of Absolute Beauty. But this could only mean that a person would have to turn from good to evil.

Wolz and Nussbaum have properly discerned the difference of views between Alcibiades and Socrates, even though Alcibiades largely confirms that Socrates is true to his beliefs about Eros. We will explore later (pages 198-206) how the position of Socrates is largely vindicated, but Wolz and Nussbaum rightly observe the seeds of doubt sown into Socrates’ theory by Alcibiades.
Because of the philosophical import of the drama in Alcibiades' speech, we ought to expect that the drama of the conclusion of the party (222c1-223d12) will likewise imply a philosophy of Eros. This expectation is warranted, as we will see in the remainder of the chapter. Although a thorough explication of the epilogue would reveal its philosophy, such an effort would be beyond the scope of this present work, which focuses on the prologue. Instead, we will examine in this chapter the way in which the dramatic parallels between the epilogue and prologue reflect a similar philosophy of Eros. Specifically, we will examine how the prologue and epilogue demonstrate the limits of typical symposiastic behavior in pursuing Eros. Then we will examine how the uniqueness of Agathon's party and of its chief guest, Socrates, reflects the uniqueness of the Socratic theory of Eros.

The Sway of Eros at Symposia

As we noted in the first chapter, symposia in the ancient world were associated with drinking and sex. Naturally, therefore, one would expect that Eros would be a force at any symposium, including Agathon's. He is indeed present, even if in a slightly unconventional form: Instead of indulging their sexual longings (Eros), the men discuss them. Yet though Eros' presence in the Symposium is more cerebral, the reader's expectation--and Glaucon's (172b2)--that the symposium will be driven to a large degree by Eros is fulfilled. Moreover, to the degree that Eros is manifested differently at this
symposium than at a typical symposium, the limits of the latter in satisfying the longings of Eros are shown.

The erotic nature of Agathon's party, as portrayed in the prologue and epilogue, is clearly seen when it is compared to Aphrodite's birthday party (as told by Diotima through Socrates), which serves as the archetype for all erotic symposia. It is at Aphrodite's party that Eros is first associated with symposia. Socrates narrates the events of her party to explain the role of Eros in general and his behavior at symposia in particular, where he leads men to discover beauty. Eros was conceived at Aphrodite's party; at Agathon's the guests and, above all, Socrates attempt to give birth to him again. At Aphrodite's party, Eros was born as a demi-god; at Agathon's party, he is born as a subject of philosophical inquiry.

The parallels between Agathon's and Aphrodite's parties are not accidental. Plato has intentionally had Socrates craft his telling of Aphrodite's party to reflect the data of Agathon's party. Since Agathon's party is a fiction invented by Plato and Socrates' account of Aphrodite's party is a fiction within a fiction, it is not surprising that there will be parallels between the two parties. But the fictional nature of the parties does not undermine the argument that the parallels between them are significant. Indeed, their fictional nature confirms

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9Dover, *Symposium*, 141-142, finds no precedent in Greek literature or mythology for the story of Poros and Penia; he concludes that it is Plato's own invention created in the fashion of his day. There are antecedents for Poros in Alcman, but his cosmogony is different. Penia had been personified in 388 in Aristophanes' *Plutus*, written shortly before Plato's *Symposium*. 
the importance of those parallels. Parallels between events in a historical work may be coincidental, but parallels between dramatic events in a work of fiction cannot entirely be due to chance.

As we seek to discover the parallels between the two parties, we must ask which characters play similar roles at the two parties. Upon reflection, it becomes clear that Socrates behaves at Agathon’s party as Penia does at Aphrodite’s, Agathon behaves as Poros does, and Diotima functions much as Aphrodite does.\(^{10}\) Although elsewhere we have argued that Socrates manifests the qualities of Eros mentioned in 203c6-e5, it does not follow that Socrates cannot be most akin to Penia at Aphrodite’s banquet in 203b1-c1. Eros seems to have inherited most of his traits from his mother, not his father. Even his resourcefulness and his search for beauty are traits that can be seen in Penia, who cleverly found a way to get pregnant by a god. Thus, the resemblance between Socrates and Penia actually emphasizes Socrates’ Eros-like qualities.

Both Penia and Socrates do not participate fully in their banquets. Penia comes after the banquet to receive the left-overs (203b3-4). Socrates enters while the banquet is half completed (175c4-6) and so cannot enjoy the meal fully. To underscore their

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\(^{10}\)Since Diotima is not present in either the prologue or epilogue, her affinity to Aphrodite will not be treated here. Nonetheless, the parallels between the two are striking: Both are learned in the ways of love and impart that knowledge to males. Eros and Socrates are attendants of Aphrodite and Diotima, respectively. And it is through these two women that Eros and Socrates find the way to have their longings satisfied.
exclusion from full participation in the banquet, both stand outside. Penia stands at the door (203b5) and never enters Zeus' house. Later she espies Poros who has gone out into the garden; there she seduces him. Socrates, similarly, stands on the neighbor's porch (175a8).

Why are Penia and Socrates excluded from their parties? Penia does not belong in the world of the gods, since she does not enjoy their bliss. Similarly, Socrates does not belong with the handsome aristocrats at Agathon's house. After all, he is poor--or at least acts as if he were, as his customary shoelessness suggests. Moreover, Socrates is usually ugly and disheveled and, thus, hardly the sort of man who deserves to be Agathon's guest of honor. Nonetheless, Socrates' exclusion from the banquet, unlike Penia's, is at his own instigation. Though he has received an invitation from Agathon (174a6-8), who eagerly desires to seat him next to himself (175c6-d1), Socrates to some degree merits Alcibiades' barb: He does not deserve to be sitting next to handsome men such as Agathon and Alcibiades (213c3-5).

Whether or not they are truly welcome, Socrates and Penia arrive at their banquets to encounter two men under the influence of alcohol: Socrates encounters Agathon; Penia, Poros. Technically speaking, Agathon is not drunk, but suffering from a hangover. A person with a hangover, however, is in the process of becoming sober but is still too weakened by the intake of alcohol and its aftermath to function altogether coherently. Both Socrates and Penia recognize the drunkenness of the men they meet to be an
opportunity. Penia, recognizing that she is unable to attract a mate because of her desperate circumstances, sees the drunken Poros as a potential father of her child. Similarly, Socrates recognizes that he is unable to produce any great wisdom on his own (175d8-e6). Therefore he uses the inebriated Agathon as a source to become “pregnant in his soul” (κυοῦσιν...κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν; 206c1-3).

Penia and Socrates can become pregnant only through seduction. They, however, cannot use physical beauty to seduce, since they possess none, but must employ other methods. Penia uses alcohol, while Socrates uses alcohol and rhetoric. Socrates can use alcohol because he himself is immune to the influence of alcohol (176c3-6; 214a4-5; 220a1-5), though the other guests are not. But his main instrument of seduction is his rhetoric. He makes young men like Apollodorus search out what he has said (172c5-6). Even those who are not his “pupils” are interested in his words, as Glaucon is (172a7-b3). As Alcibiades indicates, Socrates has “seduced” him and the other guests through his irresistible words (215e1-216a2; 218a2-b4).

Although Socrates has attempted to “seduce” many young men with his rhetoric (222a4-b4), he is preoccupied chiefly with Agathon in the symposium. It is next to Agathon that Socrates reclines (175c8), even as Penia lies down next to Poros (203b8-c1). It is the beauty of Agathon which has impelled Socrates to come in the first place. And it is Agathon with his “superior” wisdom that can get Socrates pregnant

11 Cf Bury, xli.
in his soul. For Socrates needs the ideas of other people in order to apprehend the truth, since his knowledge derives more from the rejection or modification of the ideas of other people than from ideas he originates.\textsuperscript{12}

Thus, the reader would expect that Agathon possesses a degree of bliss Socrates does not, even as the gods (including Poros) are happier than Penia. On further inspection, however, this does not appear to be the case—and not merely because Socrates' praise of Agathon is ironic. The respective behaviors of Agathon and Poros indicate that they are worse off than Socrates and Penia, for their drunkenness reveals a more profound poverty than that of Socrates and Penia. Though by every standard Agathon and Poros should be deemed fortunate, their behavior at their respective banquets argues the contrary.\textsuperscript{13}

In fact, the behavior of the four—Agathon and Socrates, Poros and Penia—at their banquets demonstrates their longings and their fulfillment, since δείπνα in and of themselves are designed to satisfy a

\textsuperscript{12}Cf. Pl. \textit{Tht.} 149a-151d; \textit{Symp.} 175d2-e6. The latter is spoken with irony, to be sure, but it is the Socratic irony that characterizes him throughout the Platonic corpus.

\textsuperscript{13}Lowenstam, "Paradoxes," 98, equates both Alcibiades and Socrates with Penia and Poros: Alcibiades is handsome and wealthy, like Poros, but comes uninvited to the banquet like Penia. Socrates embodies virtue, as does Poros, but is ugly and poor like Penia. In this way, argues Lowenstam, Socrates and Alcibiades exchange roles, much as Socrates forces his beloveds to become his lovers. Lowenstam's interpretation, however, is skewed in that he does not discern the ironic poverty of Resourcefulness and the resourcefulness of Poverty.
longing, chiefly for food and drink, but sometimes for sex. Hence, it is not surprising that Eros was conceived at Aphrodite’s party. But the way in which Socrates and Penia enjoy their banquets is different from the way in which Agathon and Poros do. Because Penia senses her \( \alpha \tau \rho \omicron \iota \alpha \), she is attracted to Aphrodite’s party. She seeks not only alms but, when given the opportunity, she also seeks to get pregnant by a powerful deity. The \( \delta \epsilon \iota \tau \nu \omicron \omicron \nu \), thus, offers her the way to have her basic needs (food and drink) fulfilled while also giving her a chance to enjoy a beautiful god, Poros, and to achieve immortality through her offspring (cf 203b7-c1). In a similar way, Socrates and the other guests at the party desire to come into contact with Agathon because he has been successful recently in the theater. The guests hope not only to be well fed and entertained, but also to get a glimpse of the talent that astounded so many people a few days earlier (175e4-6; cf. 194a8-b5).

It is not only the guests, however, who desire to obtain a glimpse of Beauty and the Good. Agathon himself needs the acclaim and gratification that his banquet offers him. In this way, he is very much akin to Poros, who should be so blissful that he would not need to drink to surfeit. Nonetheless, Poros indulges in the pleasures at Aphrodite’s party, gets drunk, and allows himself to be seduced by Penia.

The drunkenness of Poros, therefore, illustrates the limits of the banquet in satisfying the desire for Beauty and the Good. In one sense, Poros is truly Resourcefulness himself, in that he is filled to surfeit with the indulgence in sensual pleasures. He knows what
pleases him and sets about getting them. Yet if Poros is filled in the course of the banquet, he must have entered it unsatisfied. And, if Poros can be credited in knowing how to get his desires fulfilled, Penia, too, deserves recognition for seducing Poros. She, too, was able to discern how best to have her needs fulfilled. Thus, Poros ultimately is little better than Penia. In fact, Penia is the more resourceful of the two, for Poros allows himself to be overcome by wine and Penia, while Penia has enough presence of mind to see an opportunity for achieving what she longs for.14

Drunkenness, then, reveals that Resourcefulness is not so resourceful after all, but lacks full satisfaction of its desires. Drunkenness also reveals that Poverty is not so poor so as to have no chance of obtaining her desires, so long as she is not overwhelmed by drink. It is in this environment that Eros is conceived and operates. Eros takes advantage of beautiful hedonists and uses his poverty of beauty to acquire Beauty, just as his mother did. Therefore, the greatest sensualist cannot acquire Absolute Beauty, but Socrates—the ugliest person and one most impervious to pleasure—can ascend to see that Beauty by taking advantage of the ἐτεῖπνον.

The ἐτεῖπνον, then, gives birth to Eros, in that it awakens longings that cannot be satisfied by it. It reveals to guests that they have a lack, but it cannot fulfill the lack. Because the ἐτεῖπνον is the

14 Mitchell, 128, is not far from this understanding when he writes that "this woman Diotima must not be allowed to trick us into forgetting that while an immortal slept, mortal Neediness seized upon the Way Over. The result is Eros."
initial experience of Eros, it is an appropriate beginning for Eros, but cannot be the goal, of the erotic experience. As Agathon tells Socrates, νῦν δὲ πρὸς τὸ δεῖπνον πρῶτα τρέπου. Dining—the indulging in sensual pleasures—is the beginning of the erotic experience, even as Aphrodite's birthday party was where Eros was conceived, but not where Eros found ultimate satisfaction. Without the banquet it is impossible to be aware of the erotic, but the banquet also manifests the lack of satisfaction that comes with indulging the senses. Only later, when the flute girl and wine are dismissed, can the banquet lead to the appreciation of higher forms of beauty.15

Since those who let themselves be overcome by drinking (Agathon and Poros) are used by more sober individuals (Socrates and Penia) to awaken and satisfy erotic desires, Eros and Dionysus are akin, but are not, contra Anderson, one and the same.16

15Although Anderson is not correct in identifying Eros and Dionysus (see fn. 16 below), the reader ought not to assume that Dionysus (excessive drunkenness) is inherently anti-erotic.

16Anderson, 7-8, argues that, as Dionysus makes the actors in his plays wear masks, so he too puts on a mask in the Symposium, namely, the mask of Eros. To be sure, there are many qualities of Dionysus that Socrates uses to describe Eros: Eros dies and reappears, even as Dionysus undergoes a death and rebirth each year; Eros, like Dionysus, is a daemon; Eros is a force that dwells in all mankind, even as Dionysus is said in the Orphic myth to be spread through all life. Moreover, Anderson argues each character in the dialogue wears a mask, in effect, and is part of a Dionysian-driven drama. But Plato does not explicitly identify Eros with Dionysus. Whatever qualities the two may share, in that they are both ephemeral demi-gods, they are not equated with one another in the dialogue. Furthermore, it is only when Dionysus is banished or
Dionysus and Eros are akin to the degree that they both strive after some pleasure: Dionysus seeks the pleasure of wine and the mantic, while Eros seeks the pleasure of beauty (including the beauty of truth). Moreover, their spheres of influence overlap, since Eros and Dionysus are credited with the mantic art. Yet, as we have seen in the previous chapter, those who are overwhelmed by the quest for Dionysian pleasure are those who cannot pursue erotic pleasures in a nobler way. Pausanias and Aristophanes are limited by their overindulgence in alcohol, so that they cannot see a greater or nobler manifestation of Eros than sex.

Dionysian indulgence serves two functions: It manifests the erotic quest for fulfillment that drives all humans; it serves as an introduction to the love of beauty, but by itself cannot lead to Absolute Beauty. The δεῖπνον, then, serves as a metaphor for Dionysian indulgence. Not only the heavy drinking associated with the symposium, but also the eating of much food demonstrate men’s sense of lack. It shows that its participants recognize an absence of fulfillment. Therefore, they desire satisfaction in the δεῖπνον.

Thus, Socrates’ behavior in the prologue and Diotima’s myth of the origin of Eros reveal that wine is not a good instrument to awaken erotic pursuit of beauty. To be sure, it was because of wine that Poros

restricted that full expression is given to Eros; that is to say, the encomia of Eros appear only after the consumption of wine is limited.

Eryximachus credits Eros for the power of prophecy; he uses Eros as a metaphor for the daemonic, the realm that reconciles man and god (188b6-d3). Socrates portrays Diotima as a prophetess from Mantinea, i.e., Prophet-land (201d2-5).
begot Eros. But Poros had no control over the process; the sober Penia manipulated Poros to achieve the satisfaction of her own desires. In the same way, the ever sober Socrates manipulates the drunken crowd to satisfy his own quest for Absolute Beauty. To the degree that Socrates apprehends Beauty better than the other guests do, it is because he is a unique guest and has used the rather unique circumstances of the symposium to suit his purposes. For he has made Dionysian frivolity give way to truly Erotic philosophy.

**The Uniqueness of Agathon's Symposium**

Agathon's symposium is rather unusual in that several elements normally associated with a symposium are removed in the prologue and reintroduced in the epilogue. Most notably, Eryximachus banishes the flute girl and heavy drinking, and Socrates attempts to avoid a large crowd. Ultimately, neither Eryximachus nor Socrates is able to have his wish. In the epilogue, Alcibiades brings in a flute girl with him (212d6) and drains a cooler of wine, while ordering the others to do the same (213d7-214a3). A small retinue of revelers enters with Alcibiades (212d7), but later a large crowd crashes the party, effectively putting an end to all discourse of Eros (223b2-6). Thus, wine, flute-girl, and crowd--banished in the prologue--are returned to the party in the epilogue.

The most obvious effect of the banishment and reintroduction of these three elements is to make the epilogue complete the prologue, so that the dialogue takes a symmetrical form. The prologue begins with drunken men (or to be more accurate, men who are recovering
from drunkenness) who have just feasted; the body of the dialogue shows men recovering from this overindulgence (hence the hiccoughs of Aristophanes occur roughly in the middle of the encomia\(^\text{18}\)); the epilogue returns the dialogue to feasting and drinking. Moreover, the dialogue begins with allusions to the crowded party on the previous day (174a6-7; 176a6-b1); the body of the dialogue, in contrast, portrays an intimate group of men discussing Eros; the epilogue adds Alcibiades and his entourage to the party and then brings in a crowd of revelers so that the symposium ends in pandemonium. In effect, then, we have a Chinese-box effect, with the epilogue reintroducing items removed in the prologue.\(^\text{19}\)

\(^{18}\)If we assume with von Blanckenhagen, 57, that there were two other guests between Pausanias and Phaedrus (the ἄλλοις τῖνάς of 180c2), then there would be a total of nine guests. Eryximachus' speech would then be the middle speech, being preceded by those of Phaedrus, the two unnamed guests and Pausanias, and followed by those of Aristophanes, Aristodemus, Agathon, and Socrates. Aristophanes hiccoughs, which occur during Eryximachus' speech, would then occupy the exact center of the encomia.

Moreover, as Lowenstam, "Paradoxes," 89, observes, Aristophanes' hiccoughs are caused by his overindulgence (ὑπὸ πλησμονῆς, 185c6) and must be "emptied" by sneezing. They physician who knows all about "emptiness and fullness (πλησμονῆν καὶ κένωσιν, 186c7)" then "fills in" for Aristophanes. Later, Eryximachus asks Aristophanes "to fill any gaps he has left (ἄναπληρῶσαι, 188e3)." This emphasis on filling and emptying continues through Aristophanes' and Agathon's speeches.

\(^{19}\)Halperin, "Narrativity," 97, has rightly noted that the dialogue does not have a perfect chiastic structure in that the epilogue does not return the reader to the Apollodorian narrative.
The banishment and reintroduction of wine, flautist, and crowd, however, not only set up a general chiastic structure for the dialogue, but also highlight the unusual character of Agathon’s symposium. Although it was not necessary that all three elements be present at a symposium, one would expect to find at least one of the three present. If a symposium had plenty of wine, the guests could make do without a flute-girl. Nor was it necessary to invite a large crowd to have a successful symposium. The archaeological evidence seems to indicate that a banquet room with couches for seven or nine people was typical.\(^\text{20}\) Thus, Agathon’s intimate symposium is no more unusual than the large bash he threw the night before.

What is highly unusual, however, is the absence or severe restriction of drinking.\(^\text{21}\) One would expect that a drinking party, συμπόσιον, would involve at least some drinking. The peculiarity of this party is underscored in both the prologue and the epilogue. In the prologue Eryximachus calls a banquet without heavy drinking a stroke of good luck (an ἔρμασιν, 176c1-d4). In the epilogue Eryximachus reiterates the unusual terms of the banquet to Alcibiades (214b9-c5). Eryximachus is content to be part of the group, he says in the prologue, because there will be some relief from the typical drinking.

\(^{20}\)Banquet rooms had either seven or nine couches, which were usually occupied by one person only. Von Blanckenhagen, 57.

\(^{21}\)This does not imply that ordinary drinking would be unrestrained; it was the duty of the symposiarch to regulate the drinking so that the guests would be jovial but not incoherent. See Ezio Pellizer, “Outlines of a Morphology of Sympotic Entertainment” in Sympotica, 178-179.
When the relief ends and the symposium turns into a real symposium, complete with drunken revelers, Eryximachus leaves.²²

In the prologue, Eryximachus becomes the *magister bibendi* because Pausanias and Agathon decline to take the job. Under Eryximachus' guidance, the symposium becomes an opportunity to imbibe words, not wine (177e4-10).²³ After the guests have drunk fully from each other's speeches, a new guest arrives, Alcibiades, who steals Eryximachus' job from him. Alcibiades first challenges the performance of Eryximachus as *magister bibendi* by stating that the men are too sober for a drinking party (213e7-8). Then Alcibiades ignores the limits set by Eryximachus, as he drains a cooler of wine (213e10-214a1). Although Eryximachus protests that encomia, not wine, are the refreshment for the evening, Eryximachus cannot keep him from drinking heavily. Nor can Eryximachus prevent other guests from crashing the party and bringing in their drunken revelry (223b2-8). By default, Alcibiades becomes the new *magister bibendi*.

²²As Mitchell, 3, observes, the content of the dialogue fails to live up to its title.

²³Anderson, 17-18, suggests that Phaedrus is the symposiarch; for this reason, he is the first of the guests to speak, so that he can then attend his duties. Anderson cites as evidence the three occasions when Phaedrus seems to exercise authority over the group (194d; 195a; 199b). On those occasions, however, Phaedrus acts more as πατηρ λόγου than symposiarch. And in 195a, Socrates makes the appeal explicitly to Eryximachus, as moderator of the evening's discussion. Moreover, Phaedrus submits to the drinking instructions of Eryximachus (176d5-7), so that even if Phaedrus in some way controlled the drinking, he would be doing so at Eryximachus' bidding.
The prologue, then, contains the necessary ingredients for a symposium, but banishes them, while the epilogue reintroduces them. Why? These two parts of the dialogue mark the thresholds between the world of Eros and the world of talk about Eros. The body of the dialogue takes place in a world of almost surreal circumstances; the prologue removes the constraints of “symposiastic reality,” while the epilogue reintroduces them. By removing these elements of the ordinary world, the symposium is marked as being a different sort of discussion.

The crossing of a threshold is underscored by Socrates’ bathing in both the prologue and the epilogue. As the prologue indicates (174a3-4), such behavior is rather unusual for Socrates. What makes it even more unusual is that Socrates repeats the bath less than twenty-four hours later (223d10-11). Certainly, hygiene alone is not his only consideration, since that matters little to him (172a3-4; cf. also 219e7-220d5, where Alcibiades describes Socrates’ indifference to social conventions). Instead, the bathing marks a transition. The first bath brings Socrates from the world of his natural ugliness and uncleanliness into the world of beauty. He has made himself beautiful so that he can enjoy the beauty of Agathon (174a8-9).24 The second bath, however, marks the transition back into his unkempt state. It purifies him from whatever sacrilege he may have encountered at the

24Dover, Symposium, 81, observes that the Greeks commonly bathed before a banquet. This explain in part Socrates’ first bath, but not his second one.
banquet, as the guests praised Eros in false terms. As Brentlinger has observed, it is significant that Socrates bathes the second time in the grove at the Lyceum, adjacent to the Temple of Apollo. Brentlinger takes this to mean that Eros is marked not only by Dionysian youthfulness, but by a "striving for death," as embodied by Apollo. A better interpretation, however, is that the oblique reference to Apollo implies that Socrates is absolving himself of any Dionysian excess the previous day.

The ancient Greeks would have been familiar with the concept of bath as ritual cleansing. At the Plynteria the Athenian women brought the image of Athena to the sea, purified it by washing it, and then brought it back to the city. Sometimes, as part of the ceremony, murderers and other criminals were allowed to rejoin the community after undergoing the same ritual purification as the statue of Athena. A ritual bath, moreover, was part of the initiation into the Eleusinian mysteries. Since the parody of the mysteries occurred shortly


after the dramatic date of the symposium, it is fitting to see in the
bathing Plato's own appropriation of the Eleusinian mysteries.
Indeed, such an explanation accords well with Diotima's use of terms
such as "initiate" and "highest form of the mysteries" (210a1).28

As happens frequently in his works, Plato uses religious
terminology and actions to make a philosophical point.29 Plato sets
up the Symposium as an initiation into the mysteries of a demigod.
Thus, there is ritual purification (Socrates' washing) and abstention
from sex and drink.30 Moreover, the masses--δχλος--are not
understanding of the bath in the Symposium is not without precedent
in the Platonic corpus. Although the Symposium (and indeed much of
Plato's writings) are possibly tinged with Orphic language and ideas,
Plato seems to have the Eleusinian mysteries in mind in this dialogue.

In 415 B.C., shortly before the expedition to Sicily left Athens,
a number of the herms were mutilated. As this crime was
investigated, it was discovered that in the year leading up to the
expedition the Mysteries had been parodied--or at least performed
for unauthorized people. See Thuc., 6.27-29; Andoc. 1.

Cf. also the allusion to initiation used by Alcibiades in 218b, as
Anderson, 120, notes, and Socrates' rebuke to Alcibiades (οὐκ
εὐφημήσεις, 214d5), as Mitchell, 181, notes. As a woman and mantic,
Diotima is the appropriate person to initiate the guests at Agathon's
party. See Dover, Symposium, 137.

Plato refers a number of times to the mysteries (Cri. 54d, Grg.
497c, Meno 76e, Phd. 69c, 81a, Phdr. 250b, Resp. 2.378a) and
sacrifices (Resp. 1.327a, 328c). Yet as Phd. 69c-d indicates, the
religious phenomena portray in crude fashion profound philosophical
points. Thus, for example, when Socrates is about to die in the
Phaedo (117a7-8), he asks that a cock be sacrificed to the god of
healing, Asclepius; thereby, Plato uses a ritual to make the
philosophical point that the soul is cured through the death of the
body.
permitted to undergo the full initiation. Diotima initiates Socrates (209e5-210a1) and he shares his experience with only a handful of people. Yet all of this serves a philosophical point, namely, to enable the initiates to apprehend the force of Eros on mankind and to discern Absolute Beauty. Despite the religious language of the text, the encounter that Diotima outlines is not a mystical encounter, but rather a process that involves apprehension of sensual beauty and a thoughtful discussion of laws and ideas.31

30Cf. the Antletriae, who had to abstain from sex during the Thesmophoria, and the practice of fasting associated with both the Eleusinian and Thesmophorian observances. See Parke, 69, 83, 86. Turner's anthropological explanation of abstention from sex in Ndembu installation rites can be applied to the situation of the symposium, since the ties formed by the ἐρωτητικος-ἐρωμενος relationship resembled those of kinship in force: “[I]n preindustrial society, with its strong stress on kinship as the basis of many types of group affiliation, sexual continence has additional religious force. For kinship, or relations shaped by the kinship, is one of the main factors in structural differentiation. The undifferentiated character of liminality is reflected by the discontinuance of sexual relations and the absence of marked sexual polarity.” Victor W. Turner, The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), 104.

31Burkert observes what many later Platonists ignore, namely, that Plato is using the metaphor of religion to express a philosophical truth. Plato is not necessarily establishing a new cosmology, nor is he necessarily advocating a retreat into mysticism. Rather, he uses the language of his contemporary Athenian religion to express his philosophical concepts. Burkert, Greek Religion, 322-324. In this respect, his use of religion parallels his use of “cobblers” and other aspects of the culture of his day. Cf. O' Brien, 203-205, for a similar analysis. O' Brien, 204, states the case well: “Lest we take the mystical form of Dionysus’ speech more seriously than the philosophical context, we should note that it has its boozy counterpart in the speech of Alcibiades.” Cf. Allen, 86.
The prologue, thus, describes the transition from the ordinary world into the mysteries of Eros, while the epilogue returns the reader to the ordinary world. But the abstention from wine, sex, and the crowd--along with Socrates' ritual bathing--serves a greater purpose than to set up the body of the dialogue as an initiation into the mysteries of Eros. It not only signals the commencement of a unique discussion of Eros, but also facilitates it. As we saw in the last chapter, indulgence in sensual beauty can sidetrack one from the pursuit of a nobler Beauty. Lower forms of beauty would charm all the guests except for the highly self-disciplined Socrates, so that none of them would be able to discern--much less discuss--nobler objects of desire. Therefore, all objects that would tempt the "inferior" lovers must be removed.

Alcohol, first of all, must be banished or severely restricted since, if the guests were permitted, all but Socrates would lose their reason in drink. Pausanias and Aristophanes, being addicted to drink, would become drunk once again; they are, after all, able to become drunk, even though they are oι δυνατωτατοι πινειν (176c2-3). Eryximachus and Phaedrus, too, if compelled to drink, would likewise fall under the sway of alcohol, though more unwillingly. They cannot

Anderson, 64, argues that Socrates uses the metaphor of the mysteries because he is fully aware that his metaphysical system cannot be proved by using his customary epistemological method, dialectic. Diotima's Ascent to Beauty reveals an ontological understanding of the world that is in a sense derived from the dialectical method, but cannot be proved with the certainty that the dialectical method demands. Thus, Anderson believes that Plato was as aware of the problems of participation of the Forms in the Symposium as in the Parmenides.
handle alcohol, as they confess: ἡμεῖς ἀεὶ γὰρ ἀδύνατοι (176c3). Only Socrates can drink and be unaffected (176c3-5). With the temptation of drunkenness gone, however, the guests can pursue a higher form of beauty. As sober men, they can reflect more critically on Eros and his place in society.

Similarly, the removal of the flute-girl prevents the erotic attention of the men from focusing on one manifestation of sensual beauty. Consequently, the guests can see Eros as the universal force that he is. The dismissal of the flute girl, moreover, allows Socrates to become the real flautist of the dialogue. As Alcibiades notes, Socrates is a real Marsyas, who is able to charm all men by his playing (215b3-d1). In fact, Socrates is better than Marsyas, since he needs no instrument to charm men. His words have such a hypnotic effect that Alcibiades finds them irresistible.32 Moreover, Socrates in his encomium introduces a flute-girl, a woman who genuinely know all about erotic matters (201d5; 207a5-6)--Diotima.33 Diotima becomes the dialogue's expert in love, much as a flute-girl at a symposium would have been the "expert" in the art of love. Like Socrates, she derives her seductive power from her ability to describe the workings

32Cf. Mitchell, 188. Friedländer, 3:27, insightfully observes that Alcibiades in praising Socrates is at the same time praising Plato, the true Marsyas, who is able to have his protagonist (Socrates) say such persuasive words.

33As we argued earlier, p. 48, fn. 5, Diotima is a fictional character. Nonetheless, the character Socrates has fashioned his fictional teacher to be a woman who knows the workings of Eros better than any flute-girl.
of Eros. Thus, Socrates—and Diotima speaking through Socrates—are the real flautists of the dialogue. Hence their rival, the ordinary flute girl, must be removed from the symposium.

As the removal of wine and the flute girl facilitates the discussion of Eros, so does the removal of the crowd. The crowd would not only have distracted the guests by its indulgence in alcohol and sex, it would also have prevented the discussion from being as frank as it is. Socrates' pursuit of Beauty appears strange even to a friend like Alcibiades (cf. 221c2-3); a crowd would not have given Socrates an opportunity to air his views. Since the crowd had acclaimed Agathon's poetic prowess two days earlier, it would most likely have been taken in by Agathon's arguments at the symposium and not given Socrates a chance to expound his views. Similarly, Pausanias receives a fairer hearing—and is, consequently, more frank about the laws of Athens—than he would have been had a crowd been present. Even Agathon is perhaps more irreverent to the gods than the presence of a crowd would have allowed.

The removal of the crowd serves another purpose. It shows that no act of hubris is committed until the crowd bursts in. The ancient reader would have expected the symposium at Agathon's house to have been a hubristic party for two reasons. First, Phaedrus, Eryximachus, and Alcibiades were present; these men

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34Dover, *Symposium*, 4-5.

35See Dorter, 218, who demonstrates that Pausanias' views are an attack on Athenian legal conventions of the day.
were all implicated in the mutilation of the herms the next year (415 B.C.). Second, the symposium is set only one year before the mutilation of the herms; it was during this year that the Eleusinian mysteries were parodied in the course of a party. Thus, because of the guests and the setting of the symposium, the ancient reader would have expected that the symposium had either parodied the mysteries or performed some other hubristic action that would ultimately have led to the mutilation of the herms in the following year. Neither event occurs.

To be sure, there are some allusions to these events of 416 and 415 BC. Employing a term used to describe, among other things, the parodying of the mysteries (ἐφ’ ὑβρεῖ, Thucydides 6.28.2), Alcibiades and Agathon say that Socrates has been hubristic in his treatment of them (ὑβριστής εἰ, 175e7; εἰπον ἀ ὑβρισεν, 222a8). Socrates, moreover, employs the terminology of the mysteries in his speech: Socrates is an initiate but may not be able to understand the full import of the mystery rites (209e5-210a3). The ascent to Beauty is described as culminating in the sight of Absolute Beauty, much as the highlight of the mysteries would be the observing of the ἐποτικά (210a1).

Nonetheless, employing vocabulary similar to that employed by the mysteries is not exactly the same as parodying them. Although

36 It may be more accurate to say that the Mysteries were parodied not so much by substituting mocking words for the rituals of the mysteries as by performing the rituals in front of some uninitiated people. See Murray, 155-156.
Socrates does in a sense “initiate” the guests into his understanding of Eros, he does not use the rituals normally associated with the mysteries. Nor does Socrates have the guests act out the mysteries, as those who parodied them did. The reference to the mysteries remains words and fairly generic words at that: Thus, although the words ὑβριστής and ὑβρίζειν can be used to denote the paroding of mysteries, they can also denote any insolent behavior against man and god alike. Had Socrates used the words of the liturgy of the mysteries, substituting Eros for Demeter in the appropriate places, he would have been guilty of parading the mysteries. But there is no indication that he did so, for then Plato’s contemporaries would have charged him with parading the mysteries in his Symposium. 

37 Andoc. 1.11: Ἀλκιβιάδην δὲ τὸν στρατηγὸν ἀποδείξω ὑμῖν τὰ μυστήρια ποιοῦντα ἐν οἰκίᾳ μεθ’ ἐτέρων.

38 LSJ, s.v. ὑβρίζω and ὑβριστής, 1841. Although we have few examples of a γραφή ὑβρεως, it is a much discussed charge among the orators. An act of ὑβρις was not necessarily an offense against the gods or religion, but “the core concept of hubris is to be found either in the psychology of the attacker, as one who misuses his strength, or else (perhaps better) in the sociology of his victim, such that hubris is an action which intentionally causes damage to the timē (honor) of the person suffering it.” See S.C. Todd, The Shape of Athenian Law (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 107, 270-271, 379-380.

39 When Aeschylus accidentally used a number of the same words employed by the mysteries in one of his plays, he was taken to court. Though he was ultimately acquitted, the lawsuit demonstrates that an ancient Greek had to be careful in his choice of words. Certainly, Plato would have been brought to court, had his Symposium been thought to parody the mysteries outright.
Thus, although the guests at the symposium frequently employ the metaphor and terminology of the mysteries, there is no parody of them.

Thus, there was neither sacrilege at Agathon's party nor a plot to undertake a hubristic action such as the mutilation of the herms. Although there is an anti-democratic and hubristic tone to the dialogue, its hubris is more subtle. Some of the notions espoused by the guests (particularly Pausanias) may offend the conventions of Athenian democracy, but the dialogue as a whole is not as blatantly hubristic as the parody of the mysteries and the mutilation of the herms were.

In fact, the party does not become wild until after the crowd enters in the epilogue. The crowd distracts the guests from the pursuit from Absolute Beauty, for the crowd brings in the other elements (flute girl and wine) that had been excluded from the party in the prologue. Thus, Socrates' emphasis that the pursuit of Absolute Beauty is a solitary one receives confirmation. Though he can discuss Beauty and Eros with a small group of guests, he cannot describe to his host the vision of Absolute Beauty he saw on the way to the symposium (175d3-7). To pursue Beauty, Socrates must usually keep his distance from the crowd (174a7); he is unkempt and lacking social graces. When he does interact with the crowd, it is usually to reveal their ignorance by interrogating them.40

40Cf. Ap. 21c-23b, as well as Socrates' behavior in questioning Euthrypho in Euthyphro. Although Euthyphro is the only individual
Thus, all of the guests are at their best during the body of the dialogue. Since, moreover, the prologue and epilogue allow elements forbidden through most of the dialogue, the guests appear at their worst in these portions of the dialogue. For example, in the prologue Pausanias and Aristophanes are recovering from their overindulgence in alcohol the night before. Consequently, in the prologue they discuss only their drunken condition (176a5-b4). But in the body of the dialogue they develop encomia that expound a logical argument with some flair and literary grace. In the epilogue, they get swept away by the party, which no longer permits orderly drinking (223b5-6). Presumably, Pausanias falls into a drunken sleep (223c3), while Aristophanes stays up drinking with Socrates and Agathon (223c4-5).

There is good reason, therefore, that the symposium banishes the crowd along with the flute-girl and wine for most of the dialogue. But why should these elements be reintroduced? If they were so counterproductive to the working of Eros—or at least the nobler working of Eros—why should these items be reintroduced once they have been banished?

First, the reintroduction of the removed items calls attention to them. If by chance the reader missed seeing any significance to their banishment in the prologue, their reintroduction in the epilogue gives him another chance to consider why they have been absent for most with whom Socrates speaks, he exemplifies the sort of attitudes that lay behind Socrates' accusers in the Apology.
of the dialogue. In this way, the epilogue confirms the significance of
the drama of the prologue.

More importantly, the reintroduction of the banished elements
returns the symposium to reality. After all, it is fine to theorize about
the effects of Eros, but any theory about Eros must face up to the real
world. Although the surreal environment of the symposium is an
attractive and even necessary setting in which to consider Eros, it
cannot be expected to continue indefinitely. Sooner or later,
distracting elements from the real world will enter and the theories of
Eros espoused by the guests will have to be tested by reality.41

Not all of the guests can handle the real world, as the epilogue
reveals. Phaedrus and Eryximachus leave shortly after the unruly
crowd enters (223b6-8). Indeed, Eryximachus can scarcely bear
Alcibiades’ heavy drinking (215b9-c1). Given Eryximachus’
opposition to indulgence in wine as stated in the prologue (175c5-d4),
his reaction in the epilogue is not surprising.42 Meanwhile,
Pausanias either leaves, being one of the unnamed others to depart

41 As Turner, 129, has observed, a healthy society needs both
the “immediacy of communitas” and the “mediacy of structure.”
Communitas emerges as people of disparate backgrounds undergo
an initiation together and are forced to recognize their common
humanity.

42 Anderson, 39, insightfully observes that Eryximachus can be
influenced by alcohol as much as the other guests: “Although it is
hard to see a self-centered pedant--especially a pompous one like
Eryximakhos--out desecrating herms, it is not difficult to see Phaidros,
drunk, persuaded by Alkibiades, and in turn persuading a drunken
Eryximakhos that so long as they do not get caught there should be
no problem.”
(ἄλλοις τινάς, 223b7), or remains silent at the party. His departure or silence is not surprising; despite his fondness for drink, his views on Eros are too unconventional to find much approval among the crowd. Aristodemus stays, but sleeps for most of the night (223b8-c1). Since he is one of the soberer individuals (176c2) yet cannot depart from his teacher Socrates, he finds his retreat from the symposium in sleep. None of these men can handle the erotic pursuit of Beauty amid the distractions of symposiastic elements.

The only people to stay at the party and to stay alert are Socrates, Aristophanes, and Agathon. They are all drinking (223c4-5), as may be expected from the descriptions of them in the prologue (176c2-5), but Socrates is the one in control of the situation. Although Agathon and Aristophanes are the two guests who should know the most about poetry, Socrates is teaching them about their craft, not they him (223c6-d6).

Thus, Socrates alone is able to face the real world and maintain his theory of Eros. He neither flees from symposiastic reality by leaving (as do Eryximachus and Phaedrus) nor flees from it in sleep (as does Aristodemus), nor indulges in it while losing control of his faculties (as do Aristophanes and Agathon). Why? To Socrates, even drink, beautiful flute-girls, and the hubbub of the crowd contain

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43Mitchell, 222, suggests—not unreasonably, though without conclusive proof—that Alcibiades leaves before the revellers come in. Indeed, the door left open by Alcibiades, Dionysus incarnate (cf. Anderson, 101), allows the drunken revelers to enter.

the beginnings of the erotic process. They can lead to Beauty, even if they are not themselves the final goal of Eros. Though some people may despise these elements and others be seduced by them, Socrates uses them to accomplish his purpose. He prevents himself from being mastered by them and instead makes them lead him to Absolute Beauty.

Thus, the reintroduction of the banished elements supports Eryximachus' claim that Socrates can indulge or refrain from indulging (176c3-5). In either case, Socrates uses the better elements in his environment to pursue Absolute Beauty while avoiding being seduced by the baser elements. Although the other guests must have these elements removed so that they can get a glimpse of Absolute Beauty through hearing Socrates' speech, he has no such need. For he is the unique guest at Agathon's symposium.

Socrates, the Man Who Best Reflects the Uniqueness of Agathon's Symposium

So far, we have seen that Agathon's symposium is unique and that its uniqueness allows its participants to investigate Eros on a higher plane than would otherwise be possible. That uniqueness is best embodied in Socrates, whom we saw in the third chapter to be the best representation of Eros in the dialogue. Although we have already seen how the prologue portrays the erotic qualities of Socrates, it will be helpful to examine how the epilogue confirms this portrait. In this section, therefore, we will explore how Alcibiades' characterization of Socrates accords well with his behavior in the
prologue. For Alcibiades spends most of his speech describing the unusual behavior of Socrates, which reflects the latter's unusual views of Eros. And since the extraordinary circumstances of Agathon's symposium suit Socrates so well, Alcibiades' comments about Socrates highlight the unusual features of the symposium.

Alcibiades' speech confirms the prologue's allusion to Socrates' φιλεραστία. This is significant, for the dialogue as a whole evaluates Socrates' claim to erotic knowledge. In the prologue, Socrates claims that the only thing he knows is τὰ ἔρωτικὰ (177d7-8). This is no idle boast, the epilogue reveals, for Alcibiades fears Socrates' φιλεραστία. Alcibiades claims that Socrates is so ruled by Eros (and thus knowledgeable in matters pertaining to him) that Socrates becomes intensely jealous and cannot keep his hands to himself, if one of his beloveds should praise anyone but himself (214d2-4).

Not surprisingly, then, Socrates ends up seated beside handsome men in both the prologue and the epilogue. In the prologue, Agathon invites him to sit next to him on his couch. Presumably, the only people to share a couch are Socrates and

45Krischer, 53-55 argues that usually the last person to speak in a contest of speeches is the winner. If the Symposium is such a contest--and not everyone agrees that it is--then Alcibiades, not Socrates, would be the winner. Yet, as Krischer rightly argues, Alcibiades' speech confirms Socrates' victory--something that Socrates could not do without being rude. Thus, Socrates' speech is to be taken as the fullest explanation of Eros in the dialogue; Alcibiades' speech evaluates and confirms that claim. Nussbaum, 166-167, has also argues that Alcibiades' speech causes the reader of the Symposium to re-evaluate the truth of Diotima's radical notions of Eros. Thus, for Nussbaum, Alcibiades refutes--not confirms--the arguments of Socrates.
Agathon (175c6-8), and Aristodemus and Eryximachus (175a4-5); Alcibiades’ remark about a “third” person being present on Agathon’s couch implies that the guests were generally each sitting one to a couch. Thus, Socrates is granted the privilege of sitting next to a handsome man, something none of the other guests is permitted. (Eryximachus is not so privileged by having Aristodemus seated next to him: Aristodemus is μικρός and apes Socrates’ anti-social behavior, including the custom of walking shoeless; while Socrates improved his appearance for the occasion, Aristodemus did not have the opportunity to do so.) In the epilogue, Socrates again sits next to a handsome man, Alcibiades. When Alcibiades has completed his speech, Agathon moves to the other side of Socrates, so that Socrates has Alcibiades on his left and Agathon on his right. Socrates ends up getting the seating arrangement he prefers, while Alcibiades cannot, his first choice being the current arrangement (Agathon-Alcibiades-Socrates) and his second choice the arrangement with Agathon in the middle (Alcibiades-Agathon-Socrates).

Despite Socrates’ fascination with beauty, however, he does not act as a typical lover. In fact, he makes the beloveds take the more

46 For a fuller discussion, see von Blanckenhagen, 55, who argues that only young men or a man and his young lover would sit at the same couch.

47 It is Socrates who determines the seating order at the end of the dialogue; in the prologue, however, it is determined by Agathon. Nonetheless, Alcibiades credits Socrates with the ability of always finagling a seat next to a handsome youth (213c2-5). To the degree that Socrates’ stature as an intellectual has charmed Agathon, Socrates deserves credit for the seating arrangement in the prologue.
aggressive role, in effect making his beloveds lovers. Thus, in the prologue Aristodemus is called a lover (ἐραστής, 173b3) of Socrates, even though Aristodemus' youth ought to have made him an ἔρωμενος. Similarly, it is Agathon, not Socrates, who determines that the two will share a couch (175c6-8). Although Socrates is not displeased with the results, Agathon is the one who takes the initiative.

In the epilogue, Alcibiades reiterates the point that Socrates forces his beloveds to invert the roles with him. Socrates refuses to capitalize on any opportunity that an aristocratic Athenian would have: He is unmoved by physical beauty, wealth, and reputation (216d7-e2); he makes no amorous advances when alone with Alcibiades (217b3-7), nor does he make an improper move while wrestling with him (217b7-c4). Even when dining alone (217c7-d6) or sharing the same bed (219b4-d2), Socrates does not take advantage of the

48Nussbaum, 165-199, and Vlastos, 30-34, have criticized Plato speaking in the voice of Diotima/Socrates for promoting a form of love that overlooks the individual to pursue an abstract beauty. For this reason, Nussbaum, views Alcibiades' speech as a commentary on the implausibility of such love. Nye defends Diotima by noting that a healthy relationship between lovers demands that they love not only each other's bodies, but also their lover's friends, family, and ideas. See Nye, "Diotima," 143-145. Donald Levy, "The Definition of Love in Plato's Symposium," Journal of the History of Ideas 40 (1979) 286-287, defends Diotima's view of love by arguing that it may have more to do with love as it is rather than love as it ought to be. Moreover, if love inculcates virtue, there must be some concern for others. Levy has a point, but Alcibiades' speech does not bear him out, since Socrates is hardly successful at inculcating virtue in him.
situation. No matter how hard Alcibiades attempts to seduce Socrates, he cannot get him to yield.

Alcibiades, moreover, as the epilogue reveals, is not the only lover to suffer such mistreatment from Socrates. Charmides, the son of Glaucon, Euthydemus, the son of Diocles, and countless others have experienced similar treatment by Socrates (222a8-b3). With some justification, Alcibiades avers that all the guests at the symposium have been bitten by affection for Socrates and, consequently, experienced Socrates' unique manner of demonstrating his love (218a7-b3). Thus, Alcibiades' speech in the epilogue demonstrates that Socrates' treatment of Agathon in the prologue is not unusual.49

Nonetheless, Socrates' ἐρωτευόμενοι admire him and pursue him who does not pursue them in the ordinary way. This erotic effect of Socrates on his beloveds can only be termed madness. Thus, Alcibiades refers to "the madness and frenzy of his philosophy" (218b3-4).50 This madness is especially visible in Apollodorus, who asks his friends (173e1-3), "Friend, am I clearly so disposed concerning myself and you that I am crazy and have lost my wits?" 51

49 Belfiore, 148, notes the similarity between Alcibiades' situation and Agathon's. She sees Alcibiades' speech as a warning to Agathon.

50 τῆς φιλοσόφου μανίας τε καὶ βακχείας.

51 Ὁ φίλτατε, καὶ δῆλον γε δὴ ὅτι οὕτω διανοούμενος καὶ περὶ ἐμαυτοῦ καὶ περὶ ύμῶν μαίνομαι καὶ παραπαίω;
Though his friends avoid answering the question by calling his attention back to the task of narrating the dialogue, Apollodorus has guessed correctly: He is indeed mad and his madness comes from Socrates, the only man against whom he does not rail (173d4-10).

Because of their madness, Socrates' beloveds become volatile. Their attachment to philosophy becomes emotional, since erotic pursuits are not conducted entirely in a calm, rational manner. Thus, Apollodorus is overjoyed whenever he engages in philosophy, whether or not it benefits him in any way (173c2-5). And Alcibiades emphasizes primarily the seductive quality of Socrates' words rather than their content (215d3-216c3). Because of their emotional attachment to Socrates, his lovers imitate even the most minute of his quirks, such as his shoelessness (173b2).

Yet their emotional volatility—a volatility difficult to avoid when in the presence of an Eros-like man so valiant in the pursuit of Beauty—is ultimately their undoing. By the time of the retelling of the dialogue (a dozen years after the symposium), Aristodemus is doubtlessly no longer a pupil of Socrates, even though he is still alive.

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52 De Vries, 68-69, has noted the connection between Alcibiades' and Apollodorus' praise of Socrates. Both direct irony against Plato the philosopher: Alcibiades, by consciously using irony to praise Socrates (and, thus, his pupil Plato); Apollodorus, by his fanaticism, demonstrates the same characteristics. Alcibiades criticizes in Socrates.

53 Apparently, Aristodemus had told a few details about the story to Phoenix and one of Glaucon's friends had overheard the conversation. Then, the friend told Glaucon, giving him the impression that the symposium had happened recently, since he had
been interested in Socrates, he could have narrated the dialogue or Apollodorus could have referred Glaucon to him for an account of the symposium. But as Apollodorus describes him, Aristodemus was one of Socrates’ lovers at the time of the symposium (τῶν τότε, 173b3-4). Similarly, Socrates’ influence on Alcibiades has also diminished by the time of the symposium. No longer is he in any sense a pupil of Socrates; though he is very much in love with Socrates (222c1-3), he cannot bring himself to follow him.

The explanation for the volatility of Socrates’ lovers lies chiefly in that, as much as they admire him, they cannot help feeling wronged by him. Agathon and Alcibiades have both been snubbed as Socrates pursues a more ethereal Beauty rather than concentrate only on them at their banquets (175a7-c6; 217c7-219b2). To both, Socrates has spoken εἰρωνείας. Thus, both men threaten to bring charges against Socrates. They employ legal language to make their point: Agathon (175e6-9) says that he will go to court (διαδικασόμεθα) concerning whose wisdom is greater; he will use Dionysus as his judge (δικαστή). Alcibiades calls his audience jurors (ἀνδρές δικασταί, 219c5) because they are actually serving as judges of Socrates’ arrogance (219c6-7). In effect, Alcibiades in the epilogue only heard Aristodemus and Phoenix talking about it recently. From this we can assume that Aristodemus was still alive when Apollodorus narrated the symposium to Glaucon.

54 Α διαδικασία occurred when two parties made claim to the right to a certain property. Since neither of them was in possession of the property at the time, one of the disputants could not serve as a prosecutor and the other as a defendant. Instead, the dispute was seen as one between equals. See Todd, 119-120.
takes up where Agathon leaves off in the prologue. There Agathon states his desire to bring Socrates to trial, but his wish is carried out by Alcibiades.55

A paradox emerges: Socrates loves beautiful young men and they in turn are devoted to him, but Socrates' behavior ultimately turns them against him. Agathon and Alcibiades love Socrates, yet both profess a desire to take revenge on him for his hubristic treatment of them. No matter how jokingly or gently these criticisms are made, they are nonetheless reproaches leveled against Socrates and his concept of proper erotic behavior.

Why, then, does Plato portray Socrates' lovers in this way? First, this portrayal defends Socrates against the charge of corrupting the youth. Alcibiades and Agathon have attempted to seduce him, not he them. If Alcibiades is to any degree culpable for the downfall of Athens, Socrates is in no way to blame. In fact, Socrates is portrayed as having a greater effect on restraining Alcibiades than Pericles and the other statesmen (215e4-216a2) Thus, the Symposium--and Plato's portrayal of Socrates' lovers in it--serves as an apology for the character of Socrates.

More importantly, the behavior of Socrates' lovers highlights the contrast between their behavior and Socrates'. Alcibiades, for

55Dover, 166, insightfully notes that "the usual hybris of satyrs is sexual assault," but the hubris of the satyr Socrates lies in his refusal to gratify his sexual desires. But, as Allen, 104-108, observes, Alcibiades, not Socrates, is guilty of hubris. Alcibiades loves an ἐϊδωλος, not Beauty itself. This leaves him as divided and torn asunder as the statues to which he alludes in his speech.
example, approaches love from a traditional understanding, namely, that a lover should pursue a beloved with a beautiful body and then seduce him. But Socrates rejects that type of love and refuses to pretend that a lover is giving a beloved "wisdom" or some other virtue, when in reality the lover is simply gratifying his sexual urges. To be sure, this view of Eros does not satisfy Alcibiades. Consequently, no matter how much he admires Socrates, he cannot bring himself to follow him.

Thus, a distinction is made between those who have seen Absolute Beauty and those who admire or mimic the behavior of people who have. Both Alcibiades and Aristodemus have watched Socrates entranced as he ascends to Beauty. Alcibiades finds it partially an amusement (220c1-d5); Agathon, a distraction (175a10-11); and Aristodemus, an oddity best ignored (175b1-3). But they remain observers from the outside and never experience Absolute Beauty themselves. As such, they cannot comprehend what Socrates has experienced.56

This contrast between the behavior of Socrates’ professed lovers and Socrates himself underscores Socrates’ φιλεραστία.

56 Warner, 161: Alcibiades “provides, as it were, an account of [Socrates’ activity] from the perspective of the Cave-dwellers--which is, of course, that of the readers of the dialogues, ourselves.” From a different perspective, Nussbaum, 198-199, argues that in the Symposium Plato offers two visions of love: the abstract (expounded by Socrates) and the particular (expounded by Alcibiades). One cannot mix the two, adding love of a particular beloved with Absolute Beauty, as Alcibiades wants. One must choose one vision of love or the other. Thus, the two kinds of lovers are ultimately unable to communicate his or her view of love to the other.
Socrates is unique among the guests at the symposium in his understanding of what τὰ ἑρωτικά is. Because this understanding is more cognizant of a greater Beauty, Socrates' uniqueness is to be praised.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter we have seen that the symposium in and of itself was an erotic event. Usually, the presence of Eros was seen in the indulgence in wine, women, and song that characterized a symposium. Agathon's symposium, however, takes on a different character. It is an improvement on the typical symposium, since the banishment of wine, the flute-girl, and a large crowd allows for the manifestation of Eros in a nobler manner. Nonetheless, the unusual character of the symposium cannot continue indefinitely. In the epilogue, the forbidden elements return and most of the guests are overcome by them. The vision of Eros espoused by Socrates recedes as the baser erotic forces of the symposium take over. Only Socrates, who has seen a glimpse of Absolute Beauty, remains unaffected.

Since Socrates' φιλεραστία is unique, it is implicitly and explicitly analyzed and criticized in the prologue and the epilogue, especially by Agathon and Alcibiades. Although Socrates cannot lead Alcibiades, who equates the work of Eros with seduction, to understand where true Beauty lies, Socrates' perception of Eros is shown to be superior to that of Alcibiades. The prologue and epilogue reveal that, though everyone cannot understand the proper role and
object of Eros, the attentive reader can see a glimpse of Eros at work by looking at Socrates.

These two parts of the dialogue, then, serve an important function, when considered together. They set up the body of the dialogue to reflect conditions that best suit Socrates, where he can get a fair hearing from the guests. At the same time, these portions of the dialogue evaluate Socrates' claims by demonstrating that Socrates alone is able to keep to the pursuit of Absolute Beauty, as he lives in the real world.
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Why did Plato write a dramatic prologue for his *Symposium*? How is the prologue related to the rest of the dialogue, especially to the philosophical content of the dialogue? These are the questions that I set out to investigate in this dissertation. In the first chapter, I rejected an all too common approach to the dialogue, namely, to ignore the prologue and turn immediately to Phaedrus’ speech. I argued that it would be a poor way to explicate the *Symposium* to ignore six Stephanus pages, or roughly a tenth of the total dialogue. Likewise, I refused merely to comment on the “dramatic charm” or “literary grace” of the prologue, while ignoring its philosophical import, as many scholars have done. If the prologue is at all relevant to the dialogue, it must be worthy of being treated in the same earnest as the body of the dialogue.

In making this assumption, I have followed the premises of the dramatic approach to Plato. This approach emphasizes that Plato did not write philosophical treatises, but dialogues that deal with philosophical issues. Although his dialogues contain philosophical propositions and arguments, the dialogues are not exclusively a collection of such elements, as one might expect to find in a treatise. Instead, they are real life conversations with intellectuals who have
not yet turned philosophy into an academic specialty. Since a major portion of the Greek intellectual life was found in poetry and the theater, an ancient Greek would not have separated drama from philosophy. Therefore, we did not come to the *Symposium* with the preconception that the "dramatic" elements could have no bearing on the "philosophical" or vice versa. Rather, we have assumed that the drama of the dialogue colored the philosophical discussion, as well as illustrated how a particular philosophical truth accorded with the observed phenomena of real life.

Therefore, we set out to draw connections between the prologue and the body of the dialogue. We were not looking for the connections to demonstrate that Plato had the ability to craft a masterfully intricate dialogue— that point has been granted by nearly all scholars of Plato. Instead, we set out to investigate how the dramatic action in the prologue and the philosophical discussion in the body of the dialogue were designed to supplement each other.

Some of the dramatic elements in the prologue are easily recognized as necessary for the development of the dialogue and its philosophy. Eryximachus' speech, which urges the assembled guests to discuss Eros (177a2-d5), sets the stage for the rest of the dialogue. It introduces the topic and prepares the reader to expect a series of speeches rather than the give-and-take of Socratic ελεγχος. By and large, these expectations are fulfilled in the body of the dialogue. Of course, Plato could have set up his work differently. He could have written a treatise on Eros, possibly alluding to a half dozen different views on the subject and then arguing for the view that he embraced.
This, however, was not the method he chose. He chose to put the expositions of different views of Eros into the mouths of certain characters.

This method has a certain advantage: Rather than treat arguments in the abstract, Plato lets the characters of the dialogue argue as eloquently as possible for their view. This method means, however, that Plato not only had to introduce the topic of the dialogue, but the characters who would argue it. A well developed prologue became necessary in order to give the background information of the dialogue so that the arguments of the guests will not come from “straw men.” As we saw in the third chapter, Plato introduces the reader to the characters in the prologue. Without doubt, Plato built on whatever impression of the characters his audience would have had. In the prologue, however, Socrates emphasizes those particular traits that would have some bearing on the dialogue. For example, Pausanias may have been better known to Plato’s contemporaries than to us, but the only trait of Pausanias Plato reveals in the prologue is that Pausanias has drunk to excess on the previous night. For the purposes of the dialogue, this aspect of Pausanias’ moral character is most important. To evaluate Pausanias’ speech, one must know that it is spoken by a person who indulges in sensual pleasure.

Behind every action of a character is an implicit theory of Eros and Beauty. The behavior of the characters in the prologue is predicated upon their particular understanding of what true Beauty is and how one ought to pursue it. Indeed, not only the actions and personality of the characters, but also the very words of the prologue
reflect particular views about Eros. As we discovered in the fourth chapter, the prologue is filled with words that have "erotic" overtones, which gain meaning as one progresses through the body of the dialogue. Ordinary words in the prologue are recalled in a new light, when those same words are used later in the dialogue to describe Eros, Beauty and other matters of philosophical import. Thus, even simple actions and words can reflect Eros' effect on an individual and that individual's perception of Eros and Beauty.

Furthermore, as we discovered in the fifth chapter, the symposium itself manifests a peculiar understanding of Eros--one that accords best with Socrates' intentions for the symposium. Agathon's party is a symposium, but without the usual characteristics of a symposium. There is no indulgence in drink and flute-girls, but in encomia. Instead of pursuing objects of physical beauty, the crowd talks about Beauty and the desire for Beauty. Although no guest obtains lasting possession of Absolute Beauty, Socrates uses the symposium to encourage the other guests--and the reader--to see how to pursue Absolute Beauty in the best manner. For those who, like Socrates, have gotten a glimpse of Absolute Beauty are unable to be seduced by the elements reintroduced in the epilogue.

The thesis of Socrates is two-fold: all men are lovers of Beauty, but not all men pursue Beauty in the proper way. Not only has this truth been demonstrated by the setting of the symposium and by the behavior and vocabulary of the guests, but it is also proved in the seemingly least germane part of the dialogue, the Apollogodorian prologue. As we saw in the second chapter, Glaucon and
Apollodorus’ friends are interested in hearing the dialogue and Apollodorus is glad to tell it because they all desire a glimpse of Beauty. Although narration, especially of events not experienced first-hand, is open to distortion, it runs the same risk Eros does. Eros flourishes one minute and loses his life in the next one, then quickly comes back to life again. He is sometimes wealthy, sometimes poor. Thus, he is a perfect metaphor for the process of narration. Sometimes a narrative is able to relate the facts without embellishment or omission; other times narration fails to give an accurate summary of the dialogue. Thus, inasmuch as the *Symposium* is a narrated dialogue, it reminds the reader of the exhilaration and the pitfalls of the search for Beauty.

As we have examined the connections between the prologue and the philosophy of Eros espoused in the dialogue, we have frequently observed that the phenomena of the prologue are best explained by Socrates’ encomium of Eros. This is not to say that Socrates’ views are entirely consistent or without their difficulties, when applied to real life. Nor is this to say that Socrates posits a positive doctrine, when he says he knows all about Eros. If any truth can be learned from his speech, it is this: Humans lack permanent possession of beauty, especially Absolute Beauty; the best that people can do is to understand their lack and to pursue Beauty in the most productive way.

This view is the most comprehensive of all those espoused by the guests. While some of the guests equate Eros with sexual gratification or avoid the topic of sex, Socrates incorporates both a
sexual and an asexual understanding of Eros in his encomium. Although he will argue that the highest form of Eros is that of an intangible, invisible Absolute Beauty, he will not deny the value of pursuing other manifestations of beauty. Thus, his views of Eros are at the same time the most realistic of those proposed by the guests and the most idealizing. He does not etherialize Eros by denying the corporeal objects of Eros; he grants that those who love beautiful bodies are legitimately called lovers. Nonetheless, he establishes a hierarchy of values that encourages the reader to transcend physical beauty and pursue the beauty that does not fade as time passes.

Plato, therefore, through Socrates encourages the reader to see Eros at work in the drama of the characters, but he also asks the reader to evaluate the drama through philosophy. Thus, we cannot separate the dramatic and the philosophical. The philosophy of the dialogue gives us insights into the drama of the prologue, while the drama of the prologue evaluates the merits of the dialogue's philosophy. There can be no better method to study the works of the man best known for advocating the "examined life."
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