

A Dual Dialectic in the *Symposium*

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More than twenty years ago I published an article on the *Symposium* in this journal.¹ Shortly before it was published, I discovered that my treatment of Aristophanes was flawed in that I had treated his conception of piety as an intrinsic value rather than an instrumental one. Being young and inexperienced, I decided it would be better to revise that section before alerting the editor, and consequently completed my revision at almost exactly the same time that the page proofs of the original version arrived in the mail. Nor did it occur to me to throw myself on the mercy of the editor and inquire how much it would cost to reset the offending paragraphs; instead I tried to content myself with appending the revised section to the offprints that I sent out. Only recently, in fact, did I mention any of this to the editor, Professor Johnstone, and he responded by generously offering me this opportunity of belated rectification. Inevitably, after such a long period of time I have discovered numerous additional ways in which the original treatment could be improved—although the basic thesis remains the same—and have decided that, rather than offering patches to cover the blemishes of the earlier presentation, it would be better to defend my original thesis *de novo*.

The paper was an attempt to see whether any systematic order underlies the sequence of speeches in the *Symposium*, as one might expect in the case of a writer so rhetorically self-aware as Plato. The attempt to see the speeches in terms of some sort of ascent is, of course, nothing new. The idea suggests itself from the general impression made by the first four speeches, each of which seems more sophisticated than the last, and from the fact that all six of the speakers² begin their speeches with a criticism of their predecessors. Further encouragement to this hypothesis is provided by Socrates' speech, whose central thesis stresses the importance of an upward ascent. The obstacle, however, is the fifth speech, that of Agathon, which, even allowing for its humorous

intent, can hardly be placed above (or even alongside of) the inspired myth of his predecessor Aristophanes.³ Even in the case of the first two speakers, Phaedrus and Pausanias, the thesis becomes problematic, for although Pausanias's speech is certainly more ambitious and rhetorically more sophisticated, the conceptions of eros and value in Phaedrus's speech are more adequate (at least from the standpoint of Socrates) than those in Pausanias's speech. The question of an ascent, we shall see, does not admit of a simple yes or no.

Socrates criticises not only his immediate predecessor, Agathon, but also the preceding speech of Aristophanes. The reference to Aristophanes is not explicit as it was with Agathon, but it is clear enough to Aristophanes himself, who later points it out (212c). If Socrates responds to two of his predecessors, his immediate predecessor explicitly, the one before that implicitly, what about the previous three? Are there implicit replies to them as well, even though Plato no longer calls our attention to them? It turns out that such references are indeed present, but not in the same order as the original presentations.

1) Phaedrus had appealed to the stories of Alcestis and Admetus, and Achilles and Patroclus, in support of his claims:

The daughter of Pelias, Alcestis, provides ample evidence to all of Greece for what I say. She alone was willing to die instead of her husband, even though he had a father and mother, [and she was rewarded for this by the gods. . . . Similarly,] they honored Achilles, son of Thetis, and sent him to the islands of the blessed, because even though he learned from his mother that he would die after he killed Hector—and that if he didn't kill him he would return home and end his life as an old man—he dared choose to do battle for his lover Patroclus; and, having avenged him, not only died for him, but died for someone whose life was over. [179b–180a]

Socrates, however, later says, "Do you think Alcestis would have died for Admetis, or Achilles would have died for Patroclus . . . if they did not think that the memory—which even now we still possess—of their virtue would be immortal?" (208d).

2) Pausanias had distinguished a dual (and incompatible) nature of eros on the basis of its parentage (181b–c), and said that eros reduces us to such straits of supplication that we are willing to sleep at the doorways (ἐπι θύρας) of our beloveds (183a). Socrates too distinguishes a dual (but compatible) nature of eros, on the basis of

its parentage (203c–d), and remarks that because of the neediness that eros inherits from its mother, Poverty, it is often reduced to sleeping in doorways (ἐπι θύραις, 203d).

3) Eryximachus had portrayed eros as a reconciliation of opposites, culminating in a mediation and communion between the gods and humanity (188d). Socrates, after rebuking Agathon for his claim that Eros is the love of like for like, argues instead that eros is the love for what is *different*—oppositely qualified—from oneself, and that consequently it is a mediator between opposites, which culminates in mediation and communion between the gods and humanity (201e–203a).

If Socrates refers to all his predecessors' speeches, but in an order different from the original presentations (Agathon, Eryximachus, Pausanias, Aristophanes, Phaedrus), then there are two sequences that must be addressed when the question of an ascent is considered. It is possible, of course, that the references are merely casual, or that their sequence reflects only the necessary order of ideas in Socrates' presentation without having any further ordinal significance. On the other hand, it is worth considering whether the two sequences might be related to the two claims within each speech. All the speeches, in praising eros, have to develop conceptions both of the nature of eros and of the nature of goodness (their criterion of praise), and they do both explicitly. Agathon, in fact, calls attention to this distinction at the end of the series.⁴ Every speech explains not only what the nature of eros is, but why this nature is good; and the criterion of goodness is developed in each case with as much care as the portrait of eros. Since, however, none of the preliminary speakers' conceptions is entirely adequate either to the nature of eros or goodness, Plato's object in presenting us with so many rejected conceptions may be to provide us with the basis for a kind of ascent in both areas.

Examining the two sequences, that of speeches and that of Socrates' allusions to his predecessors, with this possibility in mind, I came to the conclusion that the order of presentation followed a dialectical ascent in the conception of *goodness*, and the order of recollection in Socrates' speech followed a dialectical ascent in the conception of the nature of *eros*. Such a hypothesis imputes to Plato a higher degree of structural planning and subtlety than many interpreters would consider plausible, but is no less worth exploring for that. In any case, an earlier study of the *Phaedrus* led me to have a high regard for Plato's organizational subtleties, and

for the dialectical form that his sequence of presentations can take.⁵ Nevertheless, Plato's deliberately aporetic style always discourages unambiguous systematization just where the dialogues' content might seem most to encourage it. The *Symposium's* set of speeches, in which the "highest mysteries" are later to be revealed, are prefaced by a warning from the narrator, Apollodorus, that "Aristodemus did not entirely remember what each one of all the speakers said, nor do I remember all that he said. But I will give you a report of everything that he remembered best, and that seemed to me most worth remembering" (178a). More recalcitrant still is his later acknowledgement that some speeches between those of Phaedrus and Pausanias have been forgotten (180c), even though the others appear to represent the original unbroken continuity. However much the sequence of speeches may seem to manifest a pattern, we are discouraged from regarding the pattern as a definitive systematic architectonic.

I have emphasized that the progression is a dialectical one because the content of Pausanias's speech (as distinct from its form) cannot be regarded as a simple advance over Phaedrus's, either in the realm of eros or value. In a linear progression, each step must be higher than its predecessor, but in a dialectical progression, all that is necessary is that the second step stand in essential opposition to the first, with the remaining steps progressively mediating the tension between them. There is no question but that such an opposition exists between the first pair of steps in both sequences: in the sequence of presentation, Pausanias reverses Phaedrus's endorsement of self-sacrifice, by his own endorsement of self-gratification; and in the sequence in which they are later recalled by Socrates, Eryximachus's conception of primary eros as love between opposites reverses Agathon's conception of eros as love of like for like.

Let us begin by looking at a schematic representation of both of the progressions, followed in sections 2 and 3 by a more detailed documentation. The order of the speeches, together with the conception of goodness in terms of which they praise eros, may be summarized as follows:

<u>Speaker</u>	<u>Conception of the good</u>
Phaedrus	Self-sacrificing grand gestures of courage
Pausanias	Self-seeking behavior in the guise of justice
Eryximachus	Healthy moderation that reconciles opposites

Aristophanes Wholeness that unites opposite halves by means of piety
 Agathon Virtuous behavior

There does appear to be a kind of dialectical progression among these theses. Phaedrus advocates courageous self-sacrifice of a romantic and uncritical nature, and Pausanias advocates the reverse, naked self-interest. If we think of these in Aristotelian terms as deficiency and excess, Eryximachus represents a kind of mean. But it is a mean that rejects both extremes rather than synthesizing them, and so functions as a negative mediation rather than a positive one—not by reconciliation (which nevertheless is Eryximachus's dominant value) but by avoiding both immoderate extremes of self-indulgence and self-sacrifice. A positive reconciliation is provided by Aristophanes (Eryximachus's and Aristophanes' speeches are twinned in more than one way) in his concept of reunion, according to which we sacrifice our individuality by subordinating ourself to a greater whole, and at the same time fulfill our greatest ambition and self-indulgence by the attainment of our other half. Moreover, since piety and divine forgiveness are necessary conditions for attaining wholeness, our reunion with our other half is at the same time an atonement with the divine. Each of the speakers has associated the good with a particular virtue: courage (Phaedrus), justice (Pausanias), moderation (Eryximachus), and piety (Aristophanes). It is Agathon who then unifies them in the conception of goodness as virtue in general, consisting of justice, moderation, courage, and wisdom (instead of Aristophanes' piety).⁶ Socrates will proceed to argue that human virtue has its source in something higher still.

The following summary shows the sequence of Socrates' references to his predecessors, together with the conception of eros which they present in their speeches.

<u>Speaker</u>	<u>Conception of eros</u>
Agathon	Beautiful desire for beauty (desire for <i>like</i>)
Eryximachus	Two loves (for like and opposite); love for <i>opposite</i> is superior
Pausanias	Two loves; love for <i>like</i> is superior: it is spiritual not corporeal
Aristophanes	<i>Both</i> loves lead to self-completion, both spiritually and corporeally
Phaedrus	Love leads to self-sacrifice, self-transcendence (not completion)

Here again we can see from the chart alone why an interpretation of the sequence as a dialectical assent is attractive. Eryximachus's conception is virtually the antithesis of Agathon's; and Pausanias, who shares both Eryximachus's dual conception of eros and Phaedrus's emphasis on love of likes, embraces both of them. But the two kinds of eros that Pausanias distinguishes are never unified, and remain merely alongside each other. Aristophanes unifies them through his conception of polymorphous wholeness, but leaves us with a conception of eros that is self-centered and unable to transcend the self and self-interest. Phaedrus, however, emphasized precisely the opposite of this, eros as self-sacrifice. Even for Phaedrus, though, the sacrifice is made for another human being, and so his conception of the transcendence of the self does not provide a basis for transcending the *human*. This is the task to which Socrates then proceeds to address himself. Let us fill in some of the details, starting with the sequence of presentation.

2. The good

Phaedrus's conception of the good is "shame in what is shameful and pride in what is beautiful" (178d). But his conception of what this means is limited to something like noble (or beautiful, καλὰ) gestures. I say gestures because what counts is not the results but the show, our image in the eyes of our beloved (179a), and this especially takes the form of heroic (even when unnecessary) self-sacrifice. Into all of the speeches, however, Plato puts the seeds of their own refutation:⁷ both the conceptions of eros and those of goodness implicitly reveal their own limitations, their need for progressively more satisfactory formulation. Accordingly, one of Phaedrus's own examples shows how his conception of goodness can lead us to pursue appearances in a way that sacrifices the very substance that they are meant to reflect. He chides Orpheus for seeking Eurydice in Hades without giving up his life, and concludes that this is why the gods finally deprived him of his prize. But in fact there was no hope of his rescuing Eurydice from Hades *unless* he remained alive. To have killed himself would have been to join her in Hades, but beyond the possibility of rescue. Grand gestures of self-sacrifice are not always good, and may defeat their own ostensible reason for being.

Pausanias explores the contrary view, that self-gratifying conquest is what is good: "To conquer [the object of one's love] is

considered noble, and not to conquer is considered shameful" (182d). Far from the romanticism of Phaedrus, here the end justifies the means. To succeed in his pursuit of his beloved, the lover is justified in any behavior no matter how base, and no matter how shameful and vile it would be in any other context, including servility such as even a slave would refuse, and the violation of sacred oaths (182e–183b). Conversely, the beloved is justified in doing whatever is necessary to gratify his lover, no matter how base, in order to secure from him what *he* wants, i.e., moral education so that he may become wiser, more virtuous, and better (184d–e). The irony (invisible to Pausanias) in this advice to practise baseness as a means to achieving virtue reveals the fatal tension in Pausanias's position. In fact, the beginning of his speech betrayed the limitations of his "end justifies the means" doctrine, when he distinguished two separate kinds of love or "Aphrodite." He acknowledges that "one must praise all gods," and insists that he only wants to distinguish the two Aphrodites from each other (180e). It is not the *type* of eros but the way it is performed that matters:

In the case of every kind of behavior this is how things stand: performed in and of itself it is neither noble nor shameful. . . . But if it is done nobly and properly then it is noble, if not nobly then it is shameful. (180e–181a)

This is clearly incoherent with the claim that only success is noble and only failure shameful, and that it is permissible to indulge in the most disgraceful sort of behavior in order to achieve success. His later insistence that the only thing that determines whether behavior is noble or shameful is whether it is done for the sake of a long term conquest or a short term one (183d–e)—even if this claim were plausible—can hardly be said to resolve the tension. He equates long term with spiritual love, which he identifies with pederastic eros, and short term with corporeal love, which he identifies with heterosexual eros. Thus, heavenly love = noble behavior = success in conquest = homosexual = enduring; while common love = base behavior = failure in conquest = heterosexual = transient. Instead of removing the original tension between the criteria of noble/base behavior and success/failure, the incoherence is increased by the new criterion of long/short duration, which does not harmonize with either of the original ones, let alone both. Thus his position as a

whole collapses into incoherence as a result of the attempt to combine instrumentalism (the "end justifies the means," successful pederasty) with a traditional conception of justice (noble behavior, enduring relationships). In fact, he explicitly attempts to present all of this as sanctioned by our conception of justice,⁸ even though this requires him to reinterpret Athenian law not as the absolute prohibition of homosexuality that it was certainly meant to be, but rather (and impossibly) as a covert challenge (*ἀγωνοθετῶν*) or test (*βασανίζων*) to separate the pursuers of long-term relationships from pursuers of short-term relationships (184a).

Both Phaedrus and Pausanias advocated obsessive behavior, although of opposed kinds: romantic self sacrifice in one case, and a reckless pursuit of conquest on the other. Opposed though they are to each other, they agree in their recklessness and indifference to healthy moderation. In opposition to both of his predecessors, Eryximachus defends healthy moderation as the good. Taking over from Pausanias the distinction between two kinds of love, that of like for like, and that between opposites, Eryximachus's moderation invokes the second of these, where Pausanias had championed the first. The physician's goal is to engender the right kind of love in the body, i.e., the love for opposites, so that a healthy balance is achieved (186d). This kind of science can in fact be extended beyond individual bodies, and used to analyze meteorology, astronomy, and even religion and human behavior generally.⁹ In all aspects of existence, the love between opposites is the guiding principle. However, this sweeping conclusion is belied when he acknowledges in passing that sometimes the unhealthy love of like for like is necessary. "It is necessary to employ it very cautiously, so that its pleasure may be enjoyed without, however, producing debauchery" (187e). There is something good about the common love, then, and heavenly love cannot by itself be identified with goodness. It must tolerate love of likes as an inevitable exception. Later, he associates love with justice, piety, and moderation (188d), but makes no mention (here or elsewhere) of courage, which is usually grouped with these three. This is not an oversight, but a necessary consequence of Eryximachus's emphasis on caution: Eryximachus personifies the devotion to moderation; and moderation, as the *Statesman* will later observe, normally stands in opposition to courage (306a–309a). Eryximachus's position shows itself unable to assimilate precisely the two opposite values advocated by his predecessors. The bold courage praised by Phaedrus and the self-indulgence (love of like

for like) praised by Pausanias can only be accommodated, if at all, as exceptions to the rule. Pausanias, in embracing the mean, stands in opposition to the antithetical extremes of the previous speakers, but without reconciling them. Although the highest principle for Eryximachus is the mediation of opposites, his own principle never succeeds in mediating the opposition between Phaedrus and Pausanias. It is intermediate without mediating, it stands between them without embracing them.

We would expect to find a close connection between the speeches of Eryximachus and Aristophanes. Not only do they change places because of Aristophanes' hiccups (185d), but Aristophanes twice addresses himself specifically to Eryximachus (193b, 193d), and Eryximachus, in turn, praises his successor's speech (193e). The resemblance between the two speeches is evident. Like Eryximachus, Aristophanes praises eros from the standpoint of reconciliation. But although in one sense Aristophanes' conception of the reunion of sundered halves is not unlike Eryximachus's conception of the mediation of opposites, it avoids the dualism that threatened the latter with incoherence. For Eryximachus, alongside the love between opposites was the love of like for like, and this had to be treated as an exception that stood outside of Eryximachus's ruling principle and yet demanded to be accommodated by it. But for Aristophanes, the attraction of likes does not reflect a different kind of *goodness* (unhealthy pleasure) from the attraction of opposites (healthy balance), but only the good of a different kind of *person*. The nature of the goodness itself remains univocal: reunion in wholeness; but this will mean something different for a homosexual (aboriginal male or aboriginal female) than for a heterosexual (aboriginal hermaphrodite). The conception of wholeness is, however, more ambiguous than that of the reconciliation of opposites. The bringing together of opposites into a neutral state of resolution is an observable physical process: it can be recognized in the transition from excess to moderation. Wholeness cannot be *recognized* physically, but only *interpreted*. If a pair of two-legged people were reunited into a "Uranian" person, four-legged with two faces, an observer would have no way of knowing whether two halves have been united, or two wholes have been combined. The difference between the two speakers is ultimately that Eryximachus's conception is a physicalistic one, and Aristophanes' implies something beyond corporeality. Except for a perfunctory reference to souls in the introduction to his speech (186a), Eryximachus speaks through-

out only of the body and of corporeal elements (especially at 186b–d). But Aristophanes makes it clear that although it is the body that we speak of as divided, it is the soul that recognizes this incompleteness, and recognizes its missing half (192c–d). Aristophanes' conception of goodness as wholeness is at the level of psyche, and therefore surpasses the materialistic conception proposed by Eryximachus. One argument that Plato uses to support his claims of the superiority of soul to body is the body's propensity for becoming indisposed (see especially *Phaedo* 66b–d). We have in fact just seen an example of this in Aristophanes' hiccups, which prevented him from fulfilling his commitment in his original turn. It would be fitting if Plato composed that episode to illustrate this very point. For if the fact that Aristophanes speaks after Eryximachus reflects Plato's belief that a soul-oriented conception of goodness is more adequate than Eryximachus's corporeally oriented one, and if the inferiority of the latter is illustrated by its propensity to ailments, it is a nice touch to make that order of speaking follow from a bodily infirmity.¹⁰ In a crucial sense, however, Aristophanes is limited in essentially the same way that Eryximachus was. He is unable to sanction any departure from moderation in behavior. It was boldness and ambition for which we were punished in the first place, so our only hope for atonement with the gods is to replace our ambitiousness with submissive piety. From such a life our most distinctive striving would be gone. Erotic striving would be replaced by perpetual fulfillment, ambitious striving would be sacrificed to meek piety. However, we are pious toward the gods only in order that they consummate our love for our other half (193d), while they are willing to accommodate us only because they welcome our prayers and sacrifices (190c). In that case the relation between the divine and human is not one of love but one of mutual utility. This makes piety only a means to an end (an echo of Pausanias's position), unrelated except extrinsically to our erotic nature. We must suppress our striving nature in order to fulfill it. At this point Aristophanes' position, too, falls into two halves, essentially unmediated.

The Platonic dialogues tend to divide the concept of virtue into courage, justice, moderation, and either wisdom or piety.¹¹ The previous speakers have each focused on one virtue in particular in their encomia on eros: Phaedrus on courage, Pausanias on justice,¹² Eryximachus on moderation, and Aristophanes on piety. Since Agathon's speech is about a god, he substitutes wisdom for piety, but, with that partial exception, he incorporates all four of

the previously defended virtues into his own conception of virtue. It is a unification of the previous four theses only in a formal sense, however, since justice for Pausanias, and piety for Aristophanes, were not intrinsic values but only means to the extrinsic ends of conquest and completeness, respectively. Moreover, only in a formal sense is Agathon's conception of goodness adequate. His twin criteria for praise are goodness (the four virtues) and beauty: he argues that Eros is "most beautiful and most good" (195a). In this case alone, we would not expect to find any evidence of self-refutation, since the criteria are formally identical with the highest values presented in Plato's dialogues generally. However, the concepts turn out to be empty of content in Agathon's mouth, deliberately so since he concludes by saying that it was "in part a joke, in part moderately serious."¹³ His defense of them relies on conceptions too silly to be taken seriously, and his arguments glory in their own fallaciousness. 1) An argument for Eros's beauty is that Eros is delicate, and in order to give an appropriate image of such delicacy, Agathon cites Homer's description of Ate (Mischief. Ruin):

Delicate are her feet: for not upon the ground
Does she approach, but walking instead upon the heads of men, . . .
(*Iliad* 19.91-2)

Leaving aside the question of whether this is as pregnant an image of delicacy as Agathon pretends, it can hardly be a recommendation of Eros that he shares fundamental qualities with Ate. This is underlined by the fact that Agathon suppresses the final words of Homer's sentence: ". . . ruining people." 2) Agathon's demonstration of Eros's justice is a simple nonsequitur: "What is willingly done to someone willing, when both are in agreement, is just" (196c). Voluntary and involuntary would, however, correspond to just and unjust only if people had the wisdom to know (and act on) what they and others deserved. 3) But the proof of Eros's wisdom is merely that people in love are able to write poetry (or excel at other arts) even if they were not poets before (196e-197b)—the "wisdom" of such poetry need hardly be commented on. 4) The argument for Eros's moderation is a paralogism: "Moderation is power over pleasures and desires, but no pleasure is more powerful than Eros. If they are weaker, . . . [then] Eros has power over pleasures and desires, and is exceptionally moderate" (196c). Obviously "more powerful" is used equivocally to mean "the strongest pleasure" and "ability to

resist pleasure." 5) Finally, the testimony to Eros's courage is that "Not even Ares can stand up against Eros" (196c-d). This is a simple confusion between courage and power.

Formally, Agathon's speech deserves its place at the end of the series, because of the comprehensiveness of its conception of goodness. But it will be up to Socrates to endow the concepts of beauty and goodness with content commensurate with their form. Moreover, Socrates will mediate the discrepancy between Agathon and his predecessor over the nature of the intellectual virtue. Aristophanes had identified it as piety, Agathon as wisdom. For Socrates, the intellectual virtue will be in between piety and wisdom. It will be philosophy, *love of wisdom* (203e-204b).

3. Eros

Agathon claims to be the only speaker to describe Eros himself, and not merely the benefits that we receive from him (194e). This is true not in the sense that the previous speakers neglected the *phenomenon* of eros—for they all describe this phenomenon, interpreted either as an emotion or (in the case of Eryximachus) a cosmic force—but in the sense that only Agathon describes him as a deity. We have already seen how Agathon interprets the goodness and beauty of the god, but not how he conceives the precise nature of Eros's power. The key to that conception is Agathon's remark that, "The old account is well taken, that like is always drawn to like" (195b). He argues, accordingly, that Eros must be beautiful because it is drawn to beauty, young because it is drawn to youth, etc. The limitations of this conception, however, become visible within the speech itself, and are immediately afterward made explicit by Socrates. Sharing a couch with the famously erotic, but comparatively old and ugly, Socrates, Agathon says that because Eros embodies the principle of the attraction of like to like, the fact that Eros shuns old people and ugly ones must mean that Eros himself is young and beautiful (195b, 196a, 197b).¹⁴ To say this with Socrates in sight is, of course, to refute oneself. Indeed, Alcibiades, in his appendic speech, will assimilate Socrates to the god Eros,¹⁵ as has often been noted. Accordingly, this principle, that eros is the love of like for like, is immediately seized upon by Socrates at the conclusion of Agathon's speech and contradicted: love must be for what is qualified *differently* from oneself; love must be for what one lacks.

Where Agathon takes love to be for what is like itself, Eryximachus took the reverse position. He distinguished this kind of love from the love for what is opposed to oneself, and regards the *latter* as the important kind of love. In all areas of existence, love should be thought of as the mediation of opposites. Mediation, however, can take two forms: 1) the holding together of opposites without destroying their opposition, and 2) the homogenization of opposites into a mean. Plato has Eryximachus misunderstand Heraclitus in such a way as to show that the first of these kinds of mediation is incomprehensible to Eryximachus. Heraclitus's fragment 51 says, "At variance it is in accord with itself: *there is a backward stretching harmony* like the harmony of a bow and a lyre." Eryximachus quotes this, but without the emphasized words, and concludes that Heraclitus meant to say that what was *formerly* at variance is *subsequently* made to be in harmony. Heraclitus, he decides, simply did not express himself very well (187a-b). It is only mediation as *averaging* that Eryximachus is interested in. Accordingly, when he cured Aristophanes' hiccups by having him tickle his nose with a feather until he sneezed, the result was not a continuing combination of hiccupping and sneezing, but a neutralization of each by the other, resulting in an intermediate state in which both are cancelled. This doctrine is in apparent conflict, however, with Eryximachus's claim that love is the intermediary between the divine and human (188d). Since he conceives the nature of eros to mediate oppositions by producing an intermediate state into which the extremes disappear, the only way his eros could mediate between humans and gods would be by producing something in between, which effectively neutralized and *replaced* the mutually exclusive opposition between divine and human—a kind of demi-god perhaps who derived his power from a universal application of the principles of medical science. This may, of course, be an unintended implication of Eryximachus's position, but it represents the kind of attitude that would not be surprising in a disciple of Empedocles. Empedocles believed that not only medical science, but a science of control over nature generally, could be established on the principles of the complementary kinds of attraction—that of opposites, which he called love, and that of likes, which he called strife. On the basis of this science, he wrote,

you shall learn all the drugs for illness, and defenses against old age, since for you alone I will accomplish all this. You shall stop

the force of the tireless winds which rush upon the earth with their blasts and destroy the crop lands; and again, if you wish, you shall make them return. You shall create from black thunder storms a seasonable drought for mankind, and again you shall create from summer droughts the tree-nourishing streams that flow from the sky. And you shall lead out of Hades the spirit of dead man. (fr. 111)

Whoever could believe himself capable of commanding such forces would indeed seem to himself to be a demi-god, and this is evidently how Empedocles regarded himself:

I journey among you as an immortal god, no longer a mortal, honored by all, as is fitting. (fr. 112)

But why do I stress these things, as if it were so remarkable that I am superior to mortal humans who are easily destroyed. (fr. 113)

In the end prophets, singers, physicians, and princes come upon people of the earth, whence they spring up as gods, most highly honored. They share the hearth with other immortals and eat at the same table, released from participation in the sufferings of men, indestructible. (fr. 146-7)

If Eryximachus shares his mentor's exalted view of the medical profession (as his self-important demeanor throughout may suggest), it would explain how he thinks the gods and humans can be mediated by a kind of love that does not preserve the extremes, but merges them into an intermediate state. If, on the other hand, no such implicit hubris is intended by him, his position collapses into incoherence: as a power of mediation that destroys the character of the extremes, his love cannot reconcile the divine and human without destroying their contradistinction. Thus Socrates will accept Eryximachus's claim that eros mediates between the human and divine (202e), but will conceive it in such a way that these realms never stop being fundamentally opposed to each other (203a).

Pausanias, too, spoke of two kinds of eros (and in fact had introduced the distinction that Eryximachus only borrowed). For him, too, there is a heavenly and a common variety, and for him, too, the difference is between the love of like for like and the love of opposites, but the identification is reversed. The Aphrodite of opposites—male for female—whose parentage is both male and female (Zeus and Dione) is the common, contemptible

love (180d, 181b-c); whereas the Aphrodite of like for like—male for male¹⁶—which springs from the male principle alone (Kronos), is the heavenly, noble love (180d, 181c). Like Eryximachus, Pausanias sees love as a duality between love of the same and love of opposites, but where Eryximachus affirms the superiority of the love of opposites, Pausanias, like Agathon, advocates love of the same. His justification for this is that the love of likes is a spiritual love, while that of opposites is merely a corporeal one (183e). This is where his position shows its underlying superiority to Eryximachus's, despite the comparative sophistication of the latter in other ways, and the shallowness of Pausanias's development of this theme. The tension in his position, like that of Eryximachus's antithetical one, lies in his inability to reconcile the opposition between the two loves, i.e., in his one-sidedness. We saw that he equates noble behavior with pederastic love, and base behavior with heterosexual love. But he acknowledges that pederastic lovers, too, often behave basely (even in his sense of the word), i.e., they pursue boys too young to be capable of the intellectual maturity and stability of personality that he makes a hallmark of the heavenly love (181d-182a). So serious a problem is this that Pausanias advocates a law against liaisons with young boys, for this kind of pederasty gives the other a bad name. In that case, not only does he leave the original two kinds of eros unreconciled, but even the eros that he extols falls into two halves, one of which resembles the *discarded* species of eros. His classification ultimately breaks down. Socrates later accepts Pausanias's characterization of eros as obsessive—on one hand abjectly sleeping in doorways, on the other ruthlessly scheming after the beautiful (203c-d)—but does not make any arbitrary distinctions among the objects of love. Love of the body is not to be despised, for it may point the way to higher things.

Aristophanes shares Pausanias's view of eros as obsessively possessive, but removes the tension by regarding eros as in itself unified, and differentiated only by differences within the nature of the lover. In the case of an originally androgenous nature, the love is for opposites, male and female; while in the case of originally masculine or originally feminine natures, the love is homoerotic, like for like (190d-192a). His myth thereby reconciles not only our divided selves, but also the pair of contrasted species of love. Not only is eros in this way both for the same and the different, but it is as much a spiritual love—a love of the soul—as

a corporeal one (192c-d). Aristophanes also recaptures Eryximachus's theme of amity between gods and humans, but without the limitations of Eryximachus's conception; since Aristophanes does not conceive love in terms of the neutralising of oppositions, the divine and human retain their separate identities. The limitation in his conception of eros, however, is suggested by his remark that no lovers would refuse an offer from Hephaestus to bind and weld them together when they are lying with each other, so that rather than two separate individuals they would be permanently united into one. Why does Plato have Aristophanes assign this role to Hephaestus, when it was Apollo and Zeus who performed the original separative surgery (190e)? Homer tells the story that when Hephaestus learned of the adultery between his wife Aphrodite and Ares, he trapped them with a device that bound them inseparably when they were lying together in bed. Far from finding this the consummation of their deepest yearnings, they could not wait to be set free (*Odyssey* 8.266 ff; Dante devised a similar punishment for Francesca da Rimini and her lover Paolo: *Inferno* 5.73 ff). Contrary to Aristophanes' intention, the question he poses makes us realize that the opposite of his claim is true: most of us, if not all, would refuse such an offer. In that case, our ultimate yearning must be for something more than completion. That something more is the "good," Socrates says in criticism of Aristophanes:

There's a certain account that they seek half of themselves, these lovers; but my account states that eros is neither of the half nor of the whole if it doesn't happen, my friend, to be *good*, since men wish to amputate both their feet and hands, if they appear to them to be in a bad way. [205d-e]

For Phaedrus, eros is the urge to subordinate oneself to another, culminating in its highest manifestation as self-sacrifice. "Only lovers are willing to die for another," he says (179b), implying that this is the defining quality of eros, the quality that distinguishes eros from everything else. Phaedrus's conception of eros as the sacrifice of oneself for the sake of another is the only one that recognizes the self-transcendent aspect of eros. His "predecessors" (in the order of Socrates' assimilation) had regarded eros only as "more of the same" (Agathon), moderation of extremes (Eryximachus), self-indulgence (Pausanias), and self-completion (Aris-

tophanes). But it is self-transcendence that shows itself to be the conception of eros at the heart of Socrates' speech, and accordingly it is Phaedrus's speech to which he makes reference last. Phaedrus unwittingly reveals the limitation of his conception when he insists that Achilles was not Patroclus's lover but his beloved, and that for this reason he deserves even more credit since it was not by divine (erotic) inspiration but affection (*ἀγαπᾶ*) that he sacrificed himself for his lover Patroclus (180b). It cannot be the case, then, that "only lovers are willing to die for another." Accordingly, Socrates' rejoinder will be that Alcestis and Achilles sacrificed themselves not for love of another person, but for love of the eternal—immortal glory (208d).

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Notes

1. "The Significance of the Speeches in Plato's *Symposium*," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 2 (Fall 1969): 215–34.

2. I will not be concerned with Alcibiades' anomalous speech.

3. It is on this basis that G. R. Bury, writing in 1909, rejects the attempts of his predecessors to read the speeches as forming an ascent (*The Symposium of Plato* [Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, 1909], p. liii).

4. 194e–195a. He complains, however, that his predecessors did not praise Eros as a god, but praised only his humanistic implications. They praised eros as an emotion or natural force. Because only Agathon refers to Eros as a god, I have capitalized the term only when Agathon's conception is intended.

5. "Imagery and Philosophy in Plato's *Phaedrus*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 9 (1971): 279–88.

6. It would be impossible for Agathon to make use of the merely human virtue, piety, instead of wisdom, since he is speaking of Eros as a god rather than as a human emotion.

7. For that point in particular, and much else besides, I remain indebted to Stanley Rosen's book, *Plato's Symposium* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1968), although we may differ on details.

8. Cf. his use of *ἀδικίαν* and *δικαίως* at 182a4, 182a6, 184d5, and 185d6. This will be of some relevance vis-à-vis Agathon's speech.

9. 188a–d. Although his talk about the gods has a superficially pious ring to it, what he means turns out on closer attention to be a purely human science: "Divination is the craft which produces friendship between gods and humans, the craft by means of which we understand *human* eros insofar as it leads to justice and piety" (188c–d). There will be more to say about the status of the divine in Eryximachus when we return to him in the next section.

10. W. K. C. Guthrie had criticized my earlier article on the grounds that, "If P. had simply wanted E. to speak first . . . he could have altered the table-plan" (*A History of Greek Philosophy*, Vol. 4 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975], 382, n. 2). I did not address this point in the previous piece, but if the dramatic reason for making the switch itself served to illustrate why Aristophanes should come after Eryximachus, then this would obviously be more effective than having the "correct" order to begin with.

11. See, for example, *Meno* 78c, *Phaedo* 69b, *Republic* 427e f., *Laws* 631d; cf. *Protagoras* 349b.

12. He uses "justice" as a quasi-legalistic synonym for his foundational concept of "noble behavior": 182a4, 182a6, 184d5, and 185d6.

13. 197e. Where Agathon the tragedian presents us with a comedy, Aristophanes the comedian had insisted that his speech was not a comedy (193b, 193d). This prefigures Socrates' later claim that tragic and comic writers should be able to write in each other's genre (223d). Cf. Alexander Nehamas (*Plato's Symposium*, trans. Nehamas and Woodruff [Indianapolis IN: Hackett, 1989]), xvii.

14. Cf. Paul Woodruff (*Plato's Symposium*, trans. Nehamas and Woodruff), 34, n. 33.

15. 1) The most obvious assimilation lies in Alcibiades' substitution of Socrates for Eros as the subject of his encomium. 2) Beyond that, he compares Socrates to the demi-god Marsyas (215b) and calls him daimonic (219c), just as Socrates had called Eros a daimon (202e). 3) Socrates, too, is a mediator between the human and divine (215b), and 4) is endowed with the same virtues that the other speakers attributed to eros: moderation (216d), justice (ambiguously: 218e), wisdom (219d), courage (220d–221b), even piety (220d). 5) Because Eros's mother was Poverty, Socrates says, Eros is hard, dusty, shoeless, and homeless (203c–d). Eristodemus provided evidence that Socrates, too, is normally dusty and shoeless (174a). Socrates himself testified to his homelessness (198b–c), and Alcibiades completes the resemblance with his tribute to Socrates' hardness. 6) Eros's father was Resource, Socrates had also said, and therefore plots to obtain beautiful and good things (203d). This too, together with other related characteristics of Eros, Alcibiades attributes to Socrates (223a). Nehamas notes two additional resemblances. 7) When Alcibiades sees Socrates, he says "all of a sudden (*exaiphnēs*) you turn up out of nowhere" [213c] . . . Alcibiades' language connects Socrates with Diotima's description of the ultimate object of love, the very Form of Beauty [which also appears *exaiphnēs*: 210e]" (xxiii). 8) Alcibiades compares Socrates to "the statues of Silenus—far from beautiful on the outside but full of lovely little figures of the gods inside (215A–B). This shows Socrates [like eros] to be neither perfectly beautiful nor totally ugly, and it also offers a concrete image of . . . the lover's being pregnant" (xxiv).

16. Since the model is *pederastic* love, at least the ages will be different, but even here it is stressed that the boy should not be too young, but should be beginning to have a beard: not a child (παῖς) but a young man (νεός) (181d).