

At Liberty and In Love

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Abstract

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In this dissertation, I present three essays that study the significance of *erōs* in Plato's political philosophy and explore its practical implication for the principle of democratic liberty. The love the word *erōs* refers to in Greek, compared to *philia* and *agapē*, has a distinctively physical and intensely visceral dimension: it evokes the irrational and embodied relational impulses of the human condition. When Plato in the *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, and *Symposium* situates the most rational and most liberating human endeavor, philosophy, within the condition of *erōs*, therefore, he presents us an account of human endeavor for happiness (*eudaimonia*) always-already embedded in the condition of plurality, embodied mortality, irreducible irrationality, and relation to supra-human reality. I argue that there emerges in Plato's account of philosophy-cum-*erōs* what we could call an erotic human ontology, which at once legitimizes democratic liberty as a constitutional principle and equips us with requisite ethical resources for democratic processes, cultivating moral humility and respect for differences and individuality.

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Introduction:
At Liberty and In Love

In this dissertation, I present three essays that study the significance of *erōs* in Plato's political philosophy and explore its practical implication for the principle of democratic liberty.

Erōs is presented as a *problem* by Plato: not only is it a difficult task to fathom its nature,¹ but it is an unwieldy passion to normalize at the level of juridical regulation, whatever legitimate and urgent political and ethical demands could be made from the perspective of deliberative reason.² In such dialogues as the *Lysis*, *Symposium*, *Phaedrus* and *Republic*, Plato artfully plays out the challenge of *erōs* as a formidably consuming passion that threatens

¹ The nature of love poses challenge enough to compel Socrates into an *aporia* in the *Lysis*, to occasion a wealth of diverse accounts by different speakers in the *Symposium*, to have Socrates produce two contradicting speeches in the *Phaedrus*, and to appear in a barely explained bifurcation in two extremely opposed guises, philosophic and tyrannical, in the *Republic*.

² The speeches by Pausanias and Eryximachus in the *Symposium*, and Lysias's speech in the *Phaedrus*, which Socrates reproduces with his first speech there, as well, represent a rationally motivated regulative approach towards love: an argument that privileges the deliberative faculty of reason over an array of sensations, emotions, and passions. Socrates in most parts of the *Republic* is also presented as a representative of this position.

rationally guarded moderation, on one hand, and the challenge of capturing and addressing that very irrational challenge by means of *logos*, speech and reason, on the other.

Once the challenge is played out, however, Plato ascribes to Socrates an ingenious discourse regarding the at once fascinating and troublesome passion. Tackling the same subject of love over and over again in the above dialogues, Socrates reconfigures the question of love itself.³ Instead of asking what love is and what we should do about it, Socrates invites us to ask what we are and could be because of what love that always-already conditions the economy of our psyche is.⁴ If Socrates seeks a certain form of sublimation of the forceful passion of love, Socrates does not allow us to abstract human agency, which attempts that sublimation, from the nature of *erōs*—as if it were an extraneous object independent of who we have been, are, and will become—because of its very force operating in our psyche. Our own nature, or human nature, is implicated with the nature of *erōs* in such a way as to make the investigation into the nature of *erōs* simultaneously an auto-reflection of our own nature. And what we could do about love cannot go beyond what we could be and do because of what love is in the first place.

Therefore, what we learn in the Platonic investigation of *erōs* is not simply a theory of a peculiar passion but a theory, tentatively and repeatedly tried by Plato in his ‘middle’ dialogues, of a complex human nature that is irreducibly conditioned by multiple levels of relations and

³ I consider that this discursive innovation is only hinted at in the *Lysis*, but presented in full-fledged articulation with more certainty in the ‘middle’ dialogues that are presumed to come later in composition than the *Lysis*.

⁴ The contrast between these two approaches is most effectively illustrated by the contrast between the most expressly and self-consciously rationalist speaker of the *Symposium*, Eryximachus the physician, and Socrates. Suggestively, Eryximachus and Socrates are the two only speakers of the *Symposium* who present themselves as experts in “erotics (*ta erōtika*),” a certain knowledge of love that also imparts practicable skills on matters of love to its possessors. No other speaker in the *Symposium*, each offering his own praise of *erōs*, uses the neuter plural construction “*ta erōtika*.”

interchanges we are situated within and compelled to take care of to come to terms with our own selves as we aspire to the elevated human *telos* of virtue and happiness (*eudaimonia*).

The aim of this dissertation is to study such a complex portrayal of human nature Plato represents in the *Phaedrus*, *Symposium*, and *Republic* and read out of it a possibility for an alternative discourse of liberty to that of modern liberalism philosophically founded on an anthropocentric individualist ontology. When we look into the problematic of love as Plato presents it through Socrates' speeches and the dramatic settings and interchanges that contextualize his speeches in the above dialogues, there emerges a multifaceted and dynamic narrative of what I would like to call an erotic human ontology. Human existence is subsumed under the supra-human order of reality; situated in multiple layers of relations with others; and internally fraught with an indispensable but precarious interchange between rationality and irrationality that we are obliged carefully to negotiate. The following three essays, each exploring the complex Platonic investigation of *erōs* from different vantage points and with different interpretative foci, attempt also to shed light on the correspondingly complex and richly ambiguous nature of Plato's political argument, which tends to be open to the possibility and even necessity of democratic liberty in a well-governed city, while at the same time taking very seriously the challenge of justifying democratic liberty as a respectable political principle.

The human condition Plato represents in his dialogues on *erōs* is too complex to square well with a rigid rationalist-authoritarian hierarchy to which the practical argument of Plato's political philosophy is often reduced in reference to the *Republic*.⁵ Nonetheless, it is also

⁵ It is noteworthy that once the city-building in speech begins in the *Republic*, the speeches between Socrates and his primary interlocutors, the brothers Adeimantus and Glaucon, at least up to Book 5, repeatedly cast the relation between the legislators of the city and its inhabitants as what is comparable to the relation between humans and their domestic animals. Even the character of the best inhabitants of this city, those with 'philosophical nature,' is made out in the image of "the pedigree dogs (*tōn gennaiōn kunōn*)" (375d3-e4), whose philosophical nature,

obvious that Plato has little respect for the naturalistic discourse of liberty that he has Socrates in the eighth book of the *Republic* dismissively characterize as a typical justification of liberty much heard in a democratic city: “The liberty...Of it surely you would hear in a democratic city that it is the most beautiful thing it has, and because of it in that city alone one who is free by nature is worth living” (562b12-c2).⁶ If Plato’s erotic ontology does not sit well with such rigid rationalist political programs as he has Socrates propose in his own *Republic*, its complexity also does more to call into question than to endorse a vision of human existence as simply “free by nature.” If we are at liberty by nature in any way, it must be only in the deeply qualified way that our liberty is always-already bounded by our relation to reality (*ta onta*) and to others as well as by the constant interplay between conscious reason and spontaneous desire in our psyche—in other words, bounded by the condition of *erōs* portrayed by Plato through Socrates’ speeches.

While the philosophical bias of modern humanism would make us irk at the obvious absence in Plato’s political philosophy of an *a priori* recognition of the individual human person as an end in itself and free by nature, it would also cost us dearly if we hastened to infer from such absence a necessary impossibility to appreciate the value of liberty as a political principle of democratic participation in power. Rather the erotic ontology that discourages us from abstracting away from the complexly conditioned status of human agency opens up a valuable

Socrates proposes, is manifest in their friendly disposition to what is accustomed to it and hostility to what is not. Cf. Roslyn Weiss (2012) for her argument that the *Republic* presents two different types of philosophers—those who are philosophical by nature and those by education. I think the distinction can be made rather between two paradigms of philosophical nature, one made in abstraction of *erōs* and one not. As we will see later in chapter 3, the just city of the *Republic* up to Book 4 is constructed in complete abstraction from *erōs*.

⁶ All citations to Plato’s texts are according to the standard Stephanus numbers. I used the Oxford edition of Plato’s original texts in *Platonis Opera* (1901-). Direct quotations are mostly taken from the Hackett edition of Plato: Complete Works (1997); but when I felt more verbatim translation was necessary, I used my own translation. In the latter case, some syntactical modification to the original Greek was made in a few places to fit the quote to the syntax of English when this could be done without modifying the meaning.

discursive avenue for a subtly grounded appreciation of democratic liberty, founded on the acknowledgement of the human condition in relation to truth, which intercourses with our relation to the others and the world at large as well as with the constant interplay between the rational and the irrational within our psyche, to form our moral selfhood.

The status of Erōs in Plato's dialogues

We hear Socrates twice complain of his leisure-less life—first in the *Apology* and then in the *Phaedrus*. The ambience of these two dialogues is very different. The enchanted and relaxed Socrates in nature outside the city-wall privately converses with a friend in the one; the fatally indicted Socrates in his defense fiercely confronts the jurors of the Athenian democratic court in the other. The similar complaints made in these two dialogues convey the same characteristically Socratic preoccupation—his pursuit of wisdom that leaves him no leisure for other pursuits. Yet the temperament of Socrates' pursuit of wisdom in these two dialogues differs as much as the general ambience of each dialogue.

Offering to explain the origin of the hostile reputation against him that he sees eventually contributed to the slanderous charge of impiety and corruption of the young that brought him to the court, Socrates in the *Apology* cites a Delphic oracle—not one that he heard himself but that a trustworthy friend of his did. His friend Chaerephon “ventured to ask...if any man was wiser than” Socrates; the god's oracle at Delphi through the mouth of the Pythia was that no one was. Quite a consternation is caused in the jurors (21a). Socrates, nonetheless, unflinchingly proceeds to suggest his own interpretation of what had been for a long time an enigmatic oracle for Socrates himself—what the god “speaks in riddles” (21b). Incredulous, explains Socrates, he

took to interviewing “those reputed wise” with the intention of disproving the oracle (21c). In the course of these interviews, however, he came to see that they were *not* wise. Because he did not stop short of showing them that they were not wise, however, he became greatly disliked not only by them but by many of the bystanders, until he eventually “acquired much unpopularity, of a kind that is hard to deal with and is a heavy burden” while also acquiring a reputation for wisdom from those who were impressed with his eristic skills (23a). Notwithstanding the unexpected consequences of making himself hated by “those reputed wise” and their sympathizers and earning himself a reputation for wisdom among some others, Socrates claims he indeed earned a lesson from these experiences that enlightened him on the meaning of the strange confirmation of his wisdom by the Pythia: “that human wisdom is worth little or nothing at all” and that wisdom of mortals consists in nothing else but understanding the worthlessness of mortal wisdom (23a). Socrates is wise, or he thinks he at least has this essentially self-effacing “human wisdom.” It is a relentlessly cynical view of human wisdom, which all the same strongly motivates Socrates to continue with a sense of obligation to the god to confront anyone who believes himself wise to reveal that he is not. “Because of this occupation, I have no leisure (*ascholias*)” either for public or private affairs, as his poverty testifies to (23b). In honor of a human wisdom as the oracle teaches him, Socrates busies himself with busting the intellectual-moral conceit of others.

In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates again claims that he hardly has leisure, this time out of his devotion to the pithy injunction of the Delphic inscription: know yourself. His interest is apparently turned towards himself: he is “still unable to know, according to the Delphic inscription, myself; ridiculous indeed it seems to me to examine other things while not comprehending it” (229e-230a). This claim of preoccupation with self-knowledge is made on

the peculiar day dramatized in the *Phaedrus* when Socrates with apparent eagerness urges the namesake friend to read a speech by Lysias, which concerns a lover's clever persuasion of a boy, and proceeds to offer two long speeches on *erōs* himself, before he changes the subject of discussion to the value of written *logos* and rhetoric. Both the nature of *erōs* and the value of writing and rhetoric seem to deserve a long summer day of Socrates' time despite, or precisely because of, the occupation he assumes in deference to the Delphic inscription to investigate his own identity. Putting aside the question what is the relation between the nature of love and the art of communication in writing and speech that induces Socrates to address them in tandem in one dialogue, I would like to consider on what merit the speeches on *erōs* could claim Socrates' attention, given his professed preoccupation to know himself.

Socrates wants to know whether he happens to be “a beast more twisted and savage than Typhon, or a serener and simpler animal partaking by nature in the lot of the divine and gentle” (230a). This curiosity about his own nature could be an introverted investment in his unique individuality. But it might, or rather must, also be a question of more universal consequence in the way the masterful rhetorician and philosopher Thomas Hobbes put it in the introduction of the *Leviathan*: Hobbes (1994) refers to the same aphorism, “*read thy self*,” which according to him “was...meant...to teach us that for the similitudes of the thoughts and passions of one man to the thoughts and passions of another, whosoever looketh into himself and considereth what he doth, when he does *think, opine, reason, hope, fear, &c.* and upon what grounds, he shall thereby read and know what are the thoughts and passions of all other men upon like occasions” (4). For Hobbes, introspection into one's own psyche is to read a universal human out of his particular self. Moreover, he insists that such a task is a political imperative: “He that is to govern a whole nation must read in himself, not this or that particular man, but mankind” (1994, 5). For both the

political possibilities open to a state and the limitations attached to it derive from “the thoughts and passions” of men who comprise it: the “forme...of a commonwealth,” to put it in Hobbes’ own terms used in the full title of the *Leviathan*, should be determined by its “matter,” the generalized “man,” as his thoughts and passions define him.

That a certain theory of human nature is necessary for a political argument for a best and most practicable form of constitution is not an idiosyncratic recognition that belongs to Hobbes alone. However, few set out a theory of the human psyche with such an express announcement, insistent care, and ambitious rigor as Hobbes does. Although Plato forgoes the express fanfare announcing his agenda in the manner of Hobbes, he clearly belongs to the few who are keen to investigate the psychic economy of “not this or that particular man, but mankind.” When Plato in the *Phaedrus* presents Socrates, in slight revision to what he does in the *Apology* (and probably taking more liberty from the historical Socrates), as one who seeks to know himself, rather than one who broods on the nature of his wisdom, we might as well hypothesize that Plato is after a theory of the human psyche. This investigation is made not only in the *Phaedrus*, in which Socrates ventures a metaphorical “story” of the immortal soul in his second speech on love (246a, 253c), but also in the *Symposium*, in which the question of “human nature” as it relates to *erōs* is first broached by Aristophanes (189d). *Erōs* seems to give an occasion for Socrates to try a tentative answer to who he is—whether he might be a twisted and savage beast or a serener and simpler animal. We might find a reason for that in the *Republic*’s ambivalent presentation of *erōs* as the defining element both in the most savage and in the most godlike human types—tyrant and philosopher. Before we could “examine other things,” an account on *erōs* as it relates to who we are seems to be in order.

Eros and the question of liberty in Plato's dialogues

When Hobbes proposes to present a picture of man from his thoughts and passions, he does so with a clearly declared intention to draw from it the best form of constitution, which he argues is a monarchy that confers to a single ruler absolute sovereignty. The *Leviathan* is, among other things, a polemic against democratic liberty and republicanism: men as he describes them do not deserve and are incapable of enjoying political liberty without ruining their chance at prosperous life, or life itself at all. Nowhere in Plato's erotic dialogues do we find an express concern for an analogous problematic. If Socrates' speeches on *erōs* in the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* present a theory of human nature from the standpoint of erotic desire of humans in such a way that the most elevated possibility of philosophical life can be embedded within it, it is not apparent what political argument could be made out of it. Yet an attempt to study its political implication, especially in relation to liberty, seems within the range suggested by Plato's own problematic we encounter in the Platonic corpus.

The *Republic* can be read as much as a polemic—or at least a skeptical exercise—against democratic liberty as *Leviathan* is. Not only when Socrates ridicules in Book 8 the democratic sensibility of love of liberty as what is beneath a sound-minded man's taste (557c), but also with the very definition of justice in obvious opposition to democratic *polupragmosunē* (busibodiedness), an attack is waged against democracy. Yet, there is a growing literature that sheds light on the more democratic orientation of the *Republic* that exceeds and overrides the apparently prescriptive language and argument against democratic liberty presented in it.⁷ I am

⁷ Arlene W. Saxonhouse (2009); Greg Recco (2007); David Roochnik (2003); John Wallach (2001); Sara Monson (2000). While there have been suggestions of the democratic ethos that the Socratic philosophical way of life promotes, e.g. Peter Euben (1997) and Dana Vila (2001), the attempt to find such a resource from the *Republic* itself despite its apparent undermining of democracy's claim of legitimacy suggests a more radical revision to the strong tradition in modern literature to read the *Republic* as an anti-democratic and anti-political prescription. For

sympathetic to this literature and attempt to add to it in Chapter 3 below with a reading of the *Republic* that illustrates the decisive role of *erōs* Socrates himself directs our attention to, undermining the rationalist tone and argument he otherwise adopts. Democratic or anti-democratic, however, it is undeniable that the *Republic* problematizes the legitimacy of democratic liberty in the explicit context of conversation aimed at figuring out the most just constitutional form. It is also not insensible to assume that the question of liberty as a political principle must have loomed large in Plato's thoughts given the historical context of the demise of imperialist Athenian democracy and his witnessing when still young the death of Socrates at the hands of the democratic court of Athens. On the other hand, when Plato revisits the question of the correct constitutional order in the later *Laws*, repeating the task of mock-legislation to found a city in speech, Plato has an unnamed Athenian persuade his Spartan and Cretan companions to a day-long journey and conversation that a mixed constitution that brings together in balance democracy and monarchy—liberty and subjection—is the most desirable form of constitution (693d). Given this apparent concern with the question of liberty as a constitutional principle during the long time that spans the *Republic* and *Laws*, if not the *Apology* and *Laws*, I believe it is an interesting and important intellectual task in the study of Plato's political philosophy to consider the theoretical relation between his representation of the erotic human condition and his long-standing problematic of the value of democratic liberty.

Such studies are not lacking in the literature either; suggestions have been made in both directions to present the practical implication of Plato's theory of love as leaning towards either anti-democratic or democratic orientations. A number of critical analyses of the theory of love

representative and influential works in this tradition, see Karl Popper (1950); Hannah Arendt (1958); Isaiah Berlin (2001).

delivered through Socrates' speech in the *Symposium* have suggested its incompatibility, or uneasy relation, with a robust political life of liberty and diversity in the city.⁸ Relatively fewer studies have been made on the opposite side.⁹ On my part, I would like to present my studies in this dissertation as an addition to the latter side in this controversy, while I also intend them to contribute to the growing literature that explores the democratic dimension of Plato's political philosophy in general.¹⁰

In the first chapter that follows, I present a study of Plato's erotic dialogues, the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, proposing that the theory of love presented in them philosophically supports the embrace of democratic liberty in the *Laws*. I support this hypothesis with a close survey of the affinity in dramatic settings and events between the *Laws* and Plato's two middle period dialogues on love, as well as with analyses of Socrates' speeches on love in these two dialogues. In the second chapter, I narrow the analytical focus onto the ethical significance of Socrates' speech in the *Symposium*, suggesting that a polemic against the vision of love as unity that forms identity and singularity between the two persons who by nature share a certain kinship—a view ascribed in the *Symposium* to Aristophanes—is an important aspect of Socrates' speech for us to consider as we seek to comprehend its practical implication. I propose that Socrates' parting with the erotic ideal of static unity in favor of a generative dynamics of love, in which we

⁸ Gregory Vlastos (1973); Martha C. Nussbaum (1986); Arlene W. Saxonhouse (1992); Allan Bloom (1993). These are all works that primarily focus on the *Symposium*.

⁹ Morris B. Kaplan (1997) offers an original reading of Socrates' speech in the *Symposium* that highlights the dimension of indeterminate identities that opens up public life to constant renegotiation and reconfiguration of individual and group identities. I am very sympathetic to Kaplan's reading and offer a similar-spirited reading in Chapter 2. Mary Nichols (2009) offers a reading of Plato's three dialogues on love with an emphatic focus on friendship, in contrast to love, to illustrate their contribution to a democratic appreciation of public life.

¹⁰ See n. 8 above.

continue to both learn and make the world and our own intellectual-moral selfhood through encounters and interchanges with others, without the possibility or desire to form a seamless identity with them, enables us to appreciate the diverse and open-ended process of public life only possible in the condition of generalized political liberty. In the last chapter, I present a reading of the *Republic* with an emphasis on the decisive role of *erōs* in its city-soul forming narrative, for Socrates' introduction of *erōs* calls into question the prominently rationalist sentiment and argument ascribed to Socrates when he proposes a tri-partite structure unilaterally controlled by the rational faculty (*logistikón*) of reason both in the soul and the city. I argue that the consequent emergence of the erotic human soul introduces the problem of self-destructive corruption as the greatest moral and political challenge both in the city and the soul, imparting a sense of deep ambivalence and ambiguity in the overall political argument of the *Republic*.

CHAPTER 1

Socrates' Palinode to Eros, Plato's Palinode to Liberty

Three elderly men—an Athenian, a Cretan, and a Spartan—are on the way from Knossos to Zeus' cave and shrine. The unnamed Athenian suggests to his two foreign companions a “not unpleasant” subject of conversation (625a6) to occupy them through their long journey on foot on the longest day of the year.¹¹ So begins Plato's *Laws*, the longest of his works, generally believed to be written in his last years, as its protagonist trio, looking to walk at leisure while making frequent rests under the shade of tall trees and on green meadows, begins a conversation on the “constitutions and laws (*te politeias kai nomōn*)” (625a6-7). A short while into the conversation, Kleinias the Cretan reveals that he is one of the ten citizens of Knossos entrusted for the establishment of a new colony (702b). At his request, the conversation on “laws and constitutions” turns into a mock-legislation for this new city-to-come: they will “try to found a city in speech” by legislating for it, pretending they are founders of the new colony (702e1-2; 702c-d).

¹¹ We learn that it is the summer solstice from Megillus the Spartan's remark, “I for one would willingly extend our journey, and the present day would seem not a moment too long—though it is in fact more or less the day when the Sun-god turns past summer towards winter” (683c).

The project of building a city in speech is a familiar one. In Plato's earlier *Republic*, Socrates and his company, assuming the role of lawmaker (*nomothētēs*), build and watch a city come into being in speech. That both the *Laws* and the *Republic* feature men who attempt to enact in words the greatest and most challenging political deed, founding a lasting city, is not the only thing the two dialogues share. They share many political judgments and sentiments: suspicion of theater and poetry for their corrupting effects and the consequent need for censorship in their composition and production; an emphasis on the formative power of education and the related willingness stringently to discipline and regulate life in the city; an insistence morally and intellectually to discriminate between the superior and the inferior, which coincides in practice with the division between the few and the many, the more and the less qualified to rule; and finally, the conviction that *wisdom* as human relation to truth is what guards and holds the city together in justice. These common elements in the two dialogues seem enough to confirm Plato's persistent political opposition to a *liberal* constitution.

Nevertheless, as Plato revisits the task of founding a city in his last work, he has something to say, or to have said by his characters, about *liberty*. The elderly trio of the *Laws* adopts with little polemic the principle of mixed constitution: "it is necessary [for the constitution] to partake of (*metalabein*)" both the constitutional forms of monarchy and democracy, "sort of two mother-constitutions" (693d2-8).¹² This requirement of mixture or combination derives from the Athenian's earlier suggestion that the three fundamental aims of all constitutions that truly deserve that appellation are *liberty*, *friendship*, and *wisdom* (693b1-5; reaffirmed in 693d7-e1, 701d7-9). While liberty can mean many different things, including

¹² It is noteworthy that Kleinias does not come clean about the colony-building project until this agreement is reached. An agreement on the correct constitutional form might well be a necessary precondition for the cooperative task of the city-building legislation.

individual moral autonomy, the legal status of free men in slave societies, state sovereignty, and personal sovereignty within the delimited boundary of civil laws (or “negative liberty” as it is often called), the Athenian’s words make it plain that he means liberty in a specifically democratic sense of political right of the people to share in political authority and take part in political deliberation.¹³ In the context of the trio’s constitutional discussion when they adopt liberty as an essential constitutional aim, therefore, liberty means “liberty of *dēmos*” in politics (697c8). The *Laws*, in other words, presents a constitutional theory that embraces liberty as in democracy,¹⁴ while it also makes clear that this democratic liberty should be balanced by some form of subjection as in monarchy—to avoid its pathological excess, probably the Athenian kind.¹⁵

This embrace, if qualified, of liberty as people’s right of political participation in the *Laws* is curious, when it is set next to the apparent argument of the *Republic*. In the *Republic*, Socrates, who insists with unwavering conviction that “there will be no rest from evils (*kakōn*) in the cities before political power coincides with philosophy” (473d2-6), seems to believe that this blissful coincidence will necessarily be at the expense of democratic liberty. As Socrates sums it up at the end of Book 9 of the *Republic*, those whose grasp of “the form (*eidōs*) of the best is

¹³ The Athenian’s description of Persia under Cyrus, which, as he puts it, initially began with “more balance between subjection and liberty” before degenerating into a type of “excessive deprivation of liberty of *dēmos*” (694a3-4; 697c6-8), effectively shows us what he means by liberty. Cyrus granted his subjects, observes the Athenian, “free speech (*par-rēsian*)” and “contribution to deliberation (*sum-buleuein*)” in public matters, bringing out a measure of “equality (*to ison*)” between him and his subjects, or at least any of his subjects who demonstrated “ability” (694a3-d6).

¹⁴ Accordingly, as the three begin their legislation, we see a set of distinctively democratic institutions installed in their laws, including freedom of speech (694a-b), general assembly and popular election of “the guardians of laws” (751-8) as well as lottery (757). In addition, the Athenian emphasizes the importance of winning “consent” of the people (720).

¹⁵ The Athenian refers to the political climate of his native city: “Look: in a way, we Athenians have had the same experience as the Persians. They, of course, reduced the people to a state of complete subjection, and we encouraged the masses (*ta plēthē*) to the opposite extreme of unfettered liberty (*pasan eleutherian*)” (699e1-4).

naturally so weak” that they “cannot rule the beasts” in themselves, “ought to be slave (*doulon*) of the best person” (590c3-d1). And Socrates proposes this subjection as the only way to bring harmony in the city; for he sees no other way to make the philosophers and the multitude lacking philosophical wisdom “alike (*homoioi*) and friends (*philoï*) so far as possible” than by imposing heteronomy on the latter by the agency of what makes the former autonomous, the rule of reason (590d5-6). For the sake of wisdom and (quasi-)friendship in the city, therefore, liberty should be banished.¹⁶ The Athenian of the *Laws* tells us otherwise: “accompanied by wisdom (*meta phronēseōs*)” in the city will be friendship and *liberty* (693e1).

It might not be a great challenge to explain away the apparent difference between the *Republic* and *Laws* in their respective position on liberty. It simply could have been that Plato has become disillusioned with the idea that political power and philosophy should coincide.¹⁷ Alternatively, while remaining true to the ideal of philosophical power in principle, Plato could have decided to make a practical compromise and concession to appease and “avoid the discontent of the many” (*Laws*, 757e3-4), who are “angered” at their political exclusion (*Republic*, 487b-502a). These explanations will leave us unpuzzled about the *Laws*’ positive opinion on liberty that deviates from that of the *Republic*. According to the *Republic*, liberty—as a political principle that requires the democratic openness of political process to the *dēmos*—is incompatible with the demand of philosophy: the best city of the *Republic* guards its wisdom at

¹⁶ As Gregory Vlastos (1973, 17) put it, “Participatory democracy vanishes without a trace” in the *Republic*. Vlastos’ observation is of peculiar interest to me, for he traces the said banishment of liberty to Plato’s theory of love. This interpretation of blaming Plato’s doctrine of *erōs* for his anti-democratic conclusion in the *Republic* stands in diametric opposition to the one I will suggest below.

¹⁷ George Klosko (2006), for instance, suggests an interpretation of the *Laws* in this vein as showing a resigned leaning towards theocracy as a substitute for philosophical power.

the expense of democratic liberty;¹⁸ the constitution of the *Laws*, on the contrary, embraces liberty at the expense of philosophical integrity. The constitution of the *Laws* might be more appealing to the common sensibility of the many with its embrace of liberty, but it must be that much less philosophical. This line of interpretation renders the *Laws* less worthy of our attention in the Platonic corpus for its failure to illustrate Plato's political philosophy proper.¹⁹

I would like to risk a different hypothesis in this chapter, however, and propose that the mixed constitution of the *Laws* with its embrace of democratic liberty reflects Plato's unchanged conviction that coincidence between political power and philosophy is a necessary condition of justice in the city. My hypothesis begs for evidence of Plato's theory of philosophy that necessitates a revision to the apparent political argument of the *Republic*—that the invitation of the *dēmos* to the political process in the *Laws*, in contrast to the banishment of their political liberty in the *Republic*, is consistent with the philosophical principles Plato explores in his works. I turn to his dialogues on *erōs* for this.

In the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, both putatively belonging to 'middle-period' dialogues along with the *Republic*, Socrates gives us speeches in celebration of *erōs* as the respective occasion of each dialogue requires him to. Socrates' speeches on love, however, deliver something unsolicited: his answer to what philosophy is. Socrates praises *erōs* because philosophy is erotic. Plato's erotic dialogues, therefore, conveniently offer an expressly

¹⁸ The many and the majority are represented as the inferior and the common (*phauloi*) in the *Republic*. Socrates also conjures such images as an excitable beast (493a-b, 496d) and a naïve ship-owner (488a-e), both highly susceptible to the influence of inciting rhetoric, to represent the intellectual incompetence of the *dēmos*.

¹⁹ Leo Strauss (1987, 78) suggests that "the *Laws* [in contrast to the *Republic* and the *Statesman*] is the only political work proper of Plato." When he says this he seems to imply that the *Laws* therefore is not a philosophical work proper of Plato.

articulated theory of philosophy for us to study, comparable to that of the fifth to seventh books of the *Republic*.²⁰

Below I present my analysis both of the dramatic and argumentative hypotheses of the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* to show (1) that these dialogues contain dramatic instruments that suggestively hail the sensuous, the conventional, and the common, alerting us for an argument in the reassessment of their value for philosophy; and (2) that the theory of love developed in Socrates' speeches defines the philosophical ethos in affirmation of encounters with the imperfect and particular manifestations of the *idea* that abound in the city. Each of these dimensions that I survey in Socrates' erotic speeches in the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* disrupts the rationalistic and ascetic strain of the *Republic* and compels us to reconsider the wisdom of its banishment of liberty from the immanent perspective of philosophy itself.

Before I begin these analyses, I will briefly review the status of *erōs* in the *Republic*, for the *Republic* not only presents the tyrant as an *erōs* incarnate, but also the philosopher as a lover (*erastēs*). This ambivalence of *erōs* in the *Republic* usefully informs my interpretative strategies in the following analyses of Socrates' erotic speeches.

²⁰ It might be noteworthy that in the very beginning of the *Symposium* there appears a curious remark about a man named Glaucon: this Glaucon had heard "a badly garbled" version of Socrates' speech on *erōs* from someone else before he "just the other day" heard the fuller and more precise version that is to be narrated in the *Symposium* (172b-c). Glaucon happens to be one of the main speech partners of Socrates along with his brother Adeimantus in the *Republic* and the primary speech partner throughout in those sections of the *Republic* where *erōs* becomes a salient subject.

Erōs in the Republic

Given its definition of justice as a rational control of desires, the *Republic's* verdict on *erōs*, the unruly flame of intense sensuous desire and blunt testimony to our embodied existence, seems obvious: it needs to be put under the rule of reason. *Erōs* should be subject to reason. Socrates indeed attempts to legislate this rational requirement into the law of his best city by installing eugenically arranged marriages, with a fabricated lottery and “useful falsehood” (459c-460a). Socrates and Glaucon take note of the possible conflict between “erotic necessity (*erotikais anankais*)” and “geometrical necessity (*geōmetrikais anankais*)” that might introduce trouble into their legislation (458d). When Socrates goes on to insist upon the rationalistic eugenic arrangements of “sleeping together (*sunkoimēsis*)” nonetheless (458e-460b), he evidently embraces “geometrical necessity” at the expense of “erotic necessity.”²¹

This anti-erotic sentiment is echoed again in the ninth book of the *Republic*. When Socrates describes the wretchedness of tyranny both in the city and the soul, he endorses the wisdom of the old saying that “Eros is tyrant” (573b6-7). Socrates’ description of tyranny and tyrant in this part of the dialogue rests almost entirely on the odiousness of *erōs*, which enables Socrates to find further analogues for the tyrannical soul enslaved by *erōs* in madness, drunkenness, diseased pain of yearning, and melancholia (573b-c). The reason why the tyrant, apparently free to do as he pleases, can never find rest and happiness is because the erotic desires that tyrannize his soul are restless, jealous, and insatiable. There is no question of asking

²¹ Strauss (1987, 42-50) points out that the best city of the *Republic* is built in complete abstraction from the body and eros, and to the extent that this abstraction is impracticable, its best city is impossible too. While Strauss seems to infer from this insightful observation that politics is inferior to philosophy, I am inclined to think that the same predicament is repeated in the structure even of the best soul—that the philosophic soul conceived in abstraction from the body and eros is impossible.

whether this *erōs*-captivated person, with the “fairest (*epieikestata*) parts of the soul enslaved,” can ever be stable, moderate or just (577d3-4).

It would seem, then, that the antipodal opposition between philosopher and tyrant should be reproduced between philosophy and *erōs*; and that the philosopher displays an order in the soul in which the “fairest parts” of the soul overpowers *erōs*. As we return to the sixth book of the *Republic*, however, it turns out that that is not exactly the case. Here, we are presented with a philosopher who is called a “lover (*erastēs*).” The philosopher, Socrates says, “neither loses nor lessens *erōs*” until, with an “insatiable” longing, “he grasps the nature itself of each thing” (490b1-3, 475c7).

It is worthwhile to note that, when Socrates describes the best soul, or the philosophical soul, he no longer insists, as he did in legislating for the best city, on abstracting from and suppressing the natural power of *erōs*, the power to “persuade and draw (*peithein te kai helkein*)” us into action (458d6-7). As Socrates sets out to define philosopher, seeking to explain what appears even to him to be “such a paradoxical argument (*logon*)” (472a6) that philosophers have exclusive claim in the city for political power, therefore, the dichotomous opposition and neatly ordered hierarchy between reason and desire (*epithumia*) do not hold any longer. The subjugation of “erotic necessity” to “geometrical necessity,” insisted on in constructing the best city, is not reproduced in the psychic dynamics of the *erotic* philosopher.

Why does Socrates represent the best soul, the soul of the philosopher, as an erotically-charged one? For a certain spontaneous power of dragging or drawing (*helkein*) is necessary to awaken and put into motion the reasoning (*logistikon*) faculty of the soul.²² The rational faculty

²² The verb *helkein* recurs in this section, although it is used not only to refer to spontaneous attraction but also to external imposition of movement by another as in the cave allegory.

cannot initiate itself into pursuing truth, or philosophizing; it can only ratiocinate on the foundation of given principles. In this essential aspect, reason is dependent on and secondary to a desire that attaches itself to truth beyond a set of first principles that it necessarily latches onto for the function of ratiocination.²³ So the *Republic* presents us the erotic tyrant and the erotic philosopher—*erōs* to be put under rational control, on one hand, and *erōs* to initiate rational exertion, on the other.

An easy explanation for this ambivalent status of *erōs* in the *Republic* immediately suggests itself: that it derives from the nature of *erōs* that acquires its moral character from the object it is directed toward. *Erōs* is a neutral and empty vessel of intense desire, the moral value of which is determined by its objects. When directed toward sensuous and tangible things (*chrēmata*) and bodies of this world, it is wretched; but directed toward the pure and otherworldly *eidos*, it is noble.²⁴ This interpretation squares well with the political argument of the *Republic* as well. On top of the opposition between reason and desire we have another, a little more sophisticated, layer of opposition between philosophical *erōs* and sensuous *erōs*. The political implication remains the same ascetic and rationalist one: those who love the pure *eidos* in disdain of the embodied things of the world are superior and therefore should rule the lovers of the material world.

I do not believe, however, that we should take this explanation which closely matches Pausanias's argument in the *Symposium* that separates "heavenly" love from "pandemic" love for

²³ F. M. Cornford (1971) obliterates this difficulty by rendering reason itself as a kind of desire, citing 485d of the *Republic*. Plato uses the word *epithumia* in this paragraph to refer to a higher category of energy that is directed toward intellectual pursuits. However, I do not think we are warranted to infer from Socrates' acknowledgment of an intellectual *epithumia* that reason itself is *epithumia*. I would rather hypothesize Plato's own grappling with the complex relation between reason and desire, which he registers in his ambivalent representation of *erōs*. See also C. D. C. Reeve (1988, 167-169) for a similar rendering of *to logistikon* as a "conative" force.

²⁴ See, for instances of this interpretation, Cornford (1952, 72); Gerasimos Santas (1988, 186).

Plato's own, only or final answer about *erōs*.²⁵ It is at least not the one Plato presents us through Socrates' speeches in the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*. The theory of love Socrates offers in these two dialogues is different and radical: *erōs* is *always* directed to the beautiful and the good.

I will now turn to my analysis of the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, first exploring their dramatic hypotheses in comparison to those of the *Republic* and *Laws*. For Plato tends to use dramatic instruments to prepare and orient us in anticipation of argumentative hypotheses.

Hailing the sensuous, the conventional and the common

The *Republic* is set in a private house in the newly flourishing Athenian port town of Piraeus. Socrates went down to Piraeus to see the town's recently introduced religious festival and, as he is about to leave, is kept by his young friends excitedly waiting to see a horseback torch race that night, something quite "novel (*kainon*)" as Socrates remarks (328a3). There is palpable excitement about innovative novelty in the harbor town of Piraeus, which particularly attracts Socrates' younger companions, if not Socrates himself. Their attraction to novelty, however, might render them particularly susceptible to the night's conversation about to unfold; for Socrates will propose radical reforms for the overall life of the polis.²⁶ Their conversation about justice incidentally takes off as the eldest Cephalos exits the scene to "take care of the

²⁵ Pausanias' argument, with a rather conceited distinction between "heavenly" and "pandemic" love, is, like everyone else's who speaks before Socrates, at once incorporated into and refuted by Socrates' speech. R. A. Markus (1971) offers a nice analysis of this aspect of "dialectical" incorporation of different positions by Socrates in the *Symposium*.

²⁶ Prohibition of innovation in music and poetry, ironically, will soon appear in Book 3 as an essential aspect of the constitution Socrates constructs with this group of men. It is interesting that Plato ascribes the fascination with the "novel" uttered in the beginning of the *Republic* to Adeimantus, who turns out to be the primary speech partner to Socrates in those parts of the *Republic*, where Socrates proposes a series of radical reforms in musical education in an emphatic ban on introducing changes.

shrines” (331d7). The privacy of the place and the night about to descend seem appropriate for “the constitution we are telling stories of (*muthologoumen*),” as Socrates puts it (501e4-5). For in the “story” of the constitution that Socrates and the accompanying group of men entertain on this particular night, the most distinctive aspect of the Athenian public life—its liberty—is to be ridiculed and banished.

As we turn to the *Laws*, we find that the dialogue on the constitution and laws this time takes place amongst three elderly men, who repeatedly remark on their old age as a particularly favorable condition for making law-regarding inquiries. They can make sincere examination on the subject of constitutions and laws thanks to the absence of any young men around, who are dangerously inept for such inquiries due to their dull vision and lack of appreciation for the supremacy of law in the polis (635a3-5, 715d7-e1). What might aid even their sharp vision of old age is the propitious time of the year during which their journey takes place. It is midsummer, “the day the Sun-god turns past summer towards winter,” when the day is the longest and the sun, the source of all vision on this earth, is the highest (683c5). The long path of their journey on the island of ancient civilization is in itself a very old and much beaten one, most memorably by Minos, who, according to Homeric mythology, made periodic trips from Knossos to the cave to come in communion (*sunousia*) with Zeus for divination in lawmaking. The three elderly men will have to walk a long way on this long hot summer day; but the ancient path “shaded by tall trees” and dotted with “amazingly tall and beautiful cypress groves and meadows to rest on,” will not tire them (625b). They reach one such “splendid resting-place” when “dawn has become noon” since they set off for the day’s journey, the Athenian remarks

(722c7-9).²⁷ Three elderly men out in the open air, ambling through an ancient path: a different air, indeed, we might say, from that of the *Republic*.

Not many of Plato's dialogues are set in open nature. That might be because Socrates was seldom seen there. As the namesake of the *Phaedrus* says of Socrates, he seems "never to travel beyond the city walls" (230d2). Socrates himself tells us why: "I am a lover of learning (*philomathēs*); but landscapes and trees wish to teach me nothing, while humans in the city do" (230d3-5). The professed reason Socrates walked out from Athens along the river Ilissus this particular day is that Phaedrus was carrying on him the book of Lysias's speech and Socrates is a "lover of speeches (*tōn logōn erastēs*)" (228c1-2). Lysias's speech must be of particular attraction to Socrates, says Phaedrus, because it concerns love—a speech in a way "amorous (*erōtikos*)": Lysias argues in it that "it is better to give favor to the non-lover than a lover" (227c3-8). Apparently, Socrates can learn more from such urbane sophism of Lysias's speech than from "landscapes and trees" in nature. Socrates' remarks in these opening pages of the *Phaedrus*, however, is loaded with his characteristic irony. While we cannot fathom the full weight and depth of his irony until we have heard and seen all that is said and done in the *Phaedrus*, for now, we note that Socrates is raising the question of "learning": its source, mode, and method. A "lover of learning" loves *logos*, for it teaches him (230d); but an irony being planted in the glib equivalence between love-of-speech and love-of-learning anticipates a more complex and less neat relationship to emerge between *logos* and learning. What occasions this probing of a deeper meaning of learning in relation to *logos* is the accidental subject of the *logos*

²⁷ This remark on time also marks a point of shift in their discourse from a general constitutional discussion to a concrete drafting of codes of law. As the Athenian puts it, the conversation so far is like a "preamble (pro-oimia)" to their legislation. Seth Benardete (2000) takes note that this remark enables a rough calculation to figure that their journey and conversation spans a full cycle of a day, from dawn to dawn.

Phaedrus has carried on him—*erōs*, a subject, as Phaedrus intimates, Socrates is eager to hear about.²⁸

On this exceptional day outside the city walls, Socrates seems in the eyes of Phaedrus “absolutely out-of-place (*atopos*),” enchanted as he is in the beauty of the resting place by the river, to which he was putatively led by nothing but Phaedrus’ seductive “potion (*pharmakon*),” the speech of Lysias (230c6). The gently rising grassy slope is shaded under a tall and lush *platanos*; the chaste tree in full bloom fills the place with fragrance; the spring under the tree runs with cool water; fresh air echoes the cicadas’ summery and clear singing; the place with statues and votive offering must be a shrine dedicated to some Nymphs and a river god (230b2-c5). Socrates remarks of the place as if in a swoon. It is a Socrates *atopos*, indeed—not only is he literally out of his usual place, but he is a strange Socrates, whose sensory perceptions are alert and open, and who revels in them.²⁹

In this beautiful resting place, Socrates decides to compose his palinode—a second speech in recantation of the first—for Eros at “exactly high noon” (242a4-5). When even the shade disappears and the highest sun of the summer glows, he is held back by his “usual daimonion” and hears “a certain voice coming from this very place,” so that he has to speak again to “atone for” the offense of his “impious” first speech, which had repeated the “dreadful” argument of Lysias’s speech (242b8-c3, 242d4). A communion or communication of a sort

²⁸ A full exploration of this dimension of the *Phaedrus* requires a reading of its second half, where Socrates discusses rhetoric and writing after he finishes his two speeches on love. I will not venture into that section of the *Phaedrus* in this chapter. Yet this problematic of learning is relevant for the current discussion of *erōs*, as the presently following discussion will show.

²⁹ A contrast, for instance, with the Socrates of the *Phaedo*, who defines philosophy as a rehearsal of death, is unmistakable. The philosopher, according to the definition offered in the *Phaedo*, would try to shut his mind from all the stimuli of sensory perceptions in order to liberate his soul from the limiting confinement of the body.

between Socrates and the time and space of his natural surroundings ensues.³⁰ This form of communication may not be a teaching: nature “wishes to teach nothing,” as Socrates put it (230d4). Nevertheless, that does not prevent Socrates from hearing, or *receiving*, something from his surroundings. Phaedrus’s potion and Lysias’s speech might have “drugged (*katapharmakeuthentos*)” Socrates into repeating the offence of Lysias’s speech (243e1), but he is inspired by the place to undo the effect of that artificial potion. This relaxed but inspired humor of Socrates is surely reflected in his second speech on *erōs* and philosophy as productive madness and divine gift. It is noteworthy, on the other hand, that the *Laws* is the only other work of Plato that begins with a comparable humor, in which the beautiful comfort of tall trees and meadows is appreciated on a hot summer day under the glowing high sun. This shared humor subtly, if accidentally, encourages us to consider if there exists a philosophical kinship between the *Phaedrus* and *Laws* that parallels their kinship in dramatic settings.³¹

There is yet another affinity in the temper of the *Laws* and *Phaedrus*, which concerns folklore, or a widely believed myth.³² The place where Phaedrus and Socrates are resting has an old story (*mythologēma*) told about it; that there Boreas carried Orithuia away (229b-c). Do you “believe this story to be true,” Phaedrus asks Socrates (229c5). Socrates answers that while he might be able to intellectualize the meaning of the story, “like the wise men,” that the strong north wind blew the girl over the rocks while she was playing there, he does not care to (229c6-d1). He would rather “let it be (*chairein*), believing what is customarily believed about it”

³⁰ See Cornford (1952, 66-7) for a discussion of this interchange between Socrates and the natural setting.

³¹ For more discussion of this, see Benardete (2000).

³² Cicero, who imitates the dramatic opposition between the *Republic* and *Laws* in his corresponding works *De Republica* and *De Legibus*, also seems to weave together the dramatic settings of the *Laws* and *Phaedrus* with a reference to a tree that is only mythical. This literary decision by Cicero is suggestive of his recognition of the significance of the dramatic settings in Plato’s two most explicitly political writings as well as the connection between the *Laws* and *Phaedrus*.

(230a1-2).³³ It is because he would rather spend his time in the quest for his true identity—or human nature in general (230a3-6). The story of Boreas has little bearing on it and he lets it go. The *Laws* also begins with a reference to an old Homeric story about the very path the three elderly men are taking. The Athenian asks the Cretan whether he believes the story “according to Homer” that Minos departed Knossos every ninth year to visit the cave and consult his father Zeus in matters of laws there (624a7-b3). The Cretan simply answers that “that is indeed what is told among us” (624b4). Socrates does not inquire further.

The stake in truth of the old story here in the *Laws*, however, is more complex and profound than the one given an easy “*chairein*” by Socrates in the *Phaedrus*. It is a story that tells us of the divine origin of the laws, which both the Cretan and the Spartan endorse. The Cretan even says that acknowledging the divine origin of their laws is “the most just thing to say” (624a3): “among us it is Zeus, among Spartans, it is Apollo, I believe.” This time around, the conventionally believed old story concerns the foundation of justice and law in the *polis*. Still, the Athenian seems to let it lie. He neither refutes nor affirms the conventional belief in the divine origin of the laws in the native cities of his two companions; he simply acknowledges it. As the conversation continues on, however, we realize that his polite omission of refutation of his companions’ simple, or “the most just,” faith gives him a peculiar advantage in making a thoroughly *critical* examination of their laws. He can lead his foreign companions, against the grain, into seeing the faults of their own constitutions—or else the fault of their own settled opinions on their constitutions—only because he takes their reliance on the story of the divine origin of the laws seriously. He persuades the Cretan and the Spartan, for instance, into embracing a Dionysian side of life as a necessarily constitutive element of a good and complete

³³ See Jacques Derrida (1981, 67-69) for his exploration of the significance of this act of “*chairein*” in the *Phaedrus*.

human life in Book 2, by showing that it harmonizes with the *intention* of the divine lawgivers, which they ought to assume, in deference to divinity, aims at nothing falling short of a whole and complete human virtue. The Athenian does not dismiss the laws of Crete and Sparta for their deficiency so much as persuade Kleinias and Megillos to infer from the more explicitly disciplinary and austere regimen of life set out by their laws the missing piece to complement it.

What we note here is a different, and perhaps more mature and prudent, discursive strategy of constitutional critique, to be contrasted with that of the *Republic*. Critique and constitutional innovation in the *Laws* ostensibly assumes a quality of conservative *restoration*, because an undoubted perfect wisdom in the origin of the law is posited as fundamental. Even as they find faults with existing laws, this critical examination is enabled by and grounded upon the belief—if not make-believe—that these faults can be fixed in restoration of the original goodness intended by the divine lawgiver. Existing laws contain within them what we might anachronistically call the ‘spirit of laws,’ which we discern by careful and respectful studies of the existing laws. The Cretan’s naivety about the mythology on the divine origin of the law, therefore, might well be “just” indeed—and not irreconcilable with contemplative wisdom. To put it in other words, it takes a long day’s speeches about constitutions and laws for the Athenian to appreciate the practical wisdom of his companion’s naivety, and for the Cretan to come to an articulate appreciation of the “justice” undergirding his own naivety. The Athenian is at any rate never so rashly rationalistic as Machiavelli to say that all founders are obliged to fabricate a lie of divine inspiration.³⁴ Instead, he rests his rational exploration of laws on a conventional mythology on the divine origin of the laws, eventually to intellectualize the story of this mythical

³⁴ Niccolò Machiavelli (2003, I-11).

foundation with a rational theology.³⁵ His eventual rationalization of the myth does not, however, undermine its legitimacy so much as appreciatively reveal its core truth. A certain mutual ‘recognition,’ to put it in another anachronistic terminology, takes place between the Athenian and his companions; between the former’s rationalism and the latter’s conventional conformism; and between rational knowledge and folklore.

If we can interpret the three elderly men’s approximately full-day journey in the *Laws* as a dramatic representation of *understanding* as a process of communication and mutual recognition occurring over time between apparently opposed entities, it is crucial to note that it all transpires as the three are walking on the way.³⁶ Movement and understanding are parallel processes in the *Laws*. And the myth-laden path the trio is traveling symbolically encapsulates this image of movement and understanding as parallel processes—on it, as the myth has it, Minos shuttled back and forth to learn from divination. The image of shuttling to and fro for the sake of learning, incidentally, provides us with a convenient segue into the *Symposium*, in which Socrates portrays Eros as one who shuttles between the divine and the human, knowledge and ignorance.

As we shift our attention to the *Symposium*, we find that Plato does not lead us straight to the eventful night of erotic speeches when Socrates made the apparently much sought-after and much recited speech on love at the poet Agathon’s house (172a-b). We first have to meet a man named Apollodoros, who seems to have earned his share of notoriety for his zealous idolatry of Socrates (173d4-10). The *Symposium* is framed so that we hear Apollodoros recount the story of

³⁵ The *Laws*, therefore, begins with a question of the belief in a divine mythology and ends with an affirmation of the necessity of a studied and articulate theology (see 966c-968b).

³⁶ The completion of a full day’s cycle so that they end where they began in point of time, i.e., at daybreak, adds a sense of yet another beginning among the three men, who promise to take part in the actual legislation for the Cretan colony (969c4-d3).

the night to an unnamed friend who asked him to narrate it for him. Apollodoros, however, is not a firsthand witness of the events of the night; it took place many years before, whereas it has been only three years since he started to follow Socrates (172c3-6). It was “a certain Aristodemus from Kydatheneum,³⁷ small and always barefoot,” who had been there in person, “being a lover of Socrates as much as any of that time,” and recounted all the speeches made on the eventful night at Agathon’s, including that of Socrates (173b1-4). We learn from this background information that Socrates’ speech has been in circulation over many years through repeated recitation by his “lovers,” and the first person who put it in circulation among Socrates’ lovers was Aristodemus. This fact renders Aristodemus’ status in the *Symposium* unique in relation to Socrates’ speech: he is a carrier of a speech that he did not issue himself. He is not an author, but a receiver and propagator.

When we come to the beginning of Socrates’ speech on love, we realize that this unique status of Aristodemus as a speaker but not author is exactly replicated by Socrates himself. As his encomium of Eros, Socrates is going to retell what he had learned from a Mantinean woman named Diotima, a prophetess as we assume from her name (Honor-of-god) and Socrates’ description of her as “wise in this [i.e. *erōs*] and many other things” such as consulting on sacred offerings (201d1-5). Even as he speaks about love, thus, Socrates is not an author of what he speaks but a carrier and propagator of what he received, just like Aristodemus. Is then Diotima the prophetess the original author? Our answer should be negative, if we accept that she is indeed a prophetess, who by profession receives, carries, and propagates to mortals the mind (*nous*) of divinity. None of the mortal men (Apollodorus, Aristodemus, and Socrates) and woman (Diotima) in the *Symposium*, therefore, is the author of the speech that circulates as

³⁷ “*Aristodēmos...Kudathēnaieus*” (173b1-2) literally translates into “Best-people of Glory-of-Athens.”

Socrates' speech on *erōs*. Its authorship, we must say, originates from the divine. This first authorship deferred to divinity is what we find again in the *Laws* as we saw above. Because the constitutional inquiries and examinations in the *Laws* are discursively anchored in their reliance upon the mythos of the divine origin of laws, even when the three men legislate for a new colony "from the beginning," they are not so much original authors of new laws as they are careful restorers of what has been before. There is an important philosophical implication here. The truthfulness of the substance of both Socrates' speech on *erōs* in the *Symposium* and the Athenian's exposition in the *Laws*, with some cooperation from his two companions, on laws, in the last instance, rests on a certain theology, or failing that, a certain irrational faith in divinity. Truth, in other words, of what we cannot but take pains to articulate in speech to communicate one with another, ultimately rests on what will always remain beyond speech.³⁸

There is another significant role Plato assigns to the unremarkable "small and always barefoot" lover of Socrates. Aristodemus's story begins with an episodic casual exchange between him and Socrates. When Aristodemus meets freshly bathed Socrates in fancy sandals, both conditions quite out of character for Socrates, he asks Socrates where he is going. Socrates is going to dinner at Agathon's, who is celebrating for the second night his first victory for his tragedy; Socrates "beautified" in order that he might go "to the beautiful man as a beauty" himself (174a3-9). Socrates then proposes to the uninvited and unadorned Aristodemus that he too come with Socrates to Agathon's. Punning on Agathon's name, Socrates suggests that Aristodemus's going uninvited is not inappropriate; it is as if "good men (*agathoi*) go on their own to the feast of the Goodman (*Agathōn*)" (174b4-5). Saying this indeed "would corrupt

³⁸ Plato performs this aporia in the *Parmenides*, having the master philosopher make repeated warning not to be afraid of accepting this aporia to a young and bright Socrates. Plato represents the ultimate grasp of truth as an exposure to a sudden *vision* in the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*.

(*diaphtheirōmen*)” the proverb that good men go on their own to the feast of *an inferior man* (174b3); but it is not nearly as “outrageous (*hubrisai*)” as Homer’s making his obviously inferior character Menelaus come on his own when his obviously superior character Agamemnon offers a sacrifice and gives a feast, Socrates says (174b6).³⁹ Aristodemus does not agree. He thinks that his case fits the Homeric example the better; for he is no equal of Agathon as Socrates’ “corrupt” proverb suggests. Nevertheless, he will go with Socrates: “I will indeed take the risk, but not as you say, Socrates, but according to Homer, being a common (*phaulos*) person going to the feast of a wise man (*sophou andros*) uninvited” (174c5-7). Aristodemus demands, however, that Socrates prepare a good *defense* for bringing him along; for Aristodemus will not admit that he came uninvited but will say that he was “invited by Socrates” (174c7-d1).

Will Socrates be able to say the same “corrupt” proverb to Agathon as playfully and casually as he did to Aristodemus, that the young poet of beautiful looks, pleasant riches, and freshly earned popular approval for his literary talent, is just as good as Aristodemus, a self-professedly “common” man? It is Agathon’s polished propriety that saves Socrates from the need to make such a pronouncement to his face. When Agathon sees Aristodemus he politely offers that he meant to invite Aristodemus but could not find him anywhere the day before (174e5-8).

So in the drama of the *Symposium*, Socrates did not have to, and does not, make an excuse for bringing along the uninvited Aristodemus to a gathering of the select few of Athens. However, we might well regard the exchange between Aristodemus and Socrates as an alert to find such an excuse in Socrates’ speech. We could perhaps read Socrates’ pleasant encomium of

³⁹ The episode of the uninvited Menelaus is from Homer, *Iliad*, 2.408.

Eros as a postponed excuse for his invitation of Aristodemus. We wonder whether Socrates could have been really serious when he made the provocative suggestion of moral equality between Aristodemus, Agathon, and himself in his exchange with Aristodemus. Can Aristodemus be as beautiful, good, and wise as Agathon, or Agathon as beautiful, good, and wise as Socrates? This is exactly the kind of question Plato would have had to answer to defend the republican, or mixed, constitution of the *Laws* embracing democratic liberty. The mixed constitution of the *Laws* invites the common *dēmos*, the *phauloi* of the *Republic*, to politics, in however qualified a manner, even as it aims at wisdom and friendship. On what ground can the many and the common claim equality to enter the political process of moral deliberation as well as enter the relation of friendship with those who are so obviously unequal to them in riches, education, and rational sophistication? With this problematic in mind, I will review below Socrates' speeches on love, two in the *Phaedrus* and one in the *Symposium*.

Eros as destructive madness: Socrates' first speech in the Phaedrus

As we saw above, Phaedrus is carrying a book of Lysias's speech on love. Socrates, professedly a lover of speeches, claims that he is eager to hear it and that he followed Phaedrus outside of the city only because he was bewitched by its attraction. The speech is written to persuade a beautiful boy that he should "give his favor" to a non-lover rather than a lover, Phaedrus says. The speaker of this speech, of course, presents himself as a non-lover, who according to the argument deserves the boy's favor. What a "clever" trick of "seducing," Phaedrus comments excitedly (227c5-7). With its obvious pettiness of purpose and superficially shocking reversal of common sense, it might indeed deserve to be called a "clever" speech in the sense of sophistry. With characteristic irony, Socrates responds that the argument is indeed

“noble (*gennaios*)”; why would Lysias not use his “noble” skills in speech to say likewise that one should give one’s favor to the poor rather than to the rich, to the old rather than to the young (227c9-d1)? His speeches would then serve the “public good (*dēmōphelēs*)” (227d2).

Nevertheless, Socrates knows only too well that Phaedrus cannot wait to recite it in front of Socrates. Phaedrus has already read the speech written by Lysias so many times that he knows it by heart. Socrates, however, insists that Phaedrus *read* the actual speech by Lysias from the book Phaedrus has carried with him instead of attempting to recite it from memory (228d-e).⁴⁰ When Socrates has heard it all, he is so disappointed at its stylistic failure that he feels that he can make a better speech than Lysias (235c). Now it is Phaedrus’ turn to insist that Socrates speak his own speech. Indeed the “younger and stronger” Phaedrus threatens Socrates; do not make me force you to do what you can voluntarily do (236d1-3).⁴¹ When Phaedrus swears by the platanus that he would never again recite any speeches for Socrates unless Socrates makes his own and better speech than Lysias’s, Socrates in his playfully feigned terror gives in, and his first speech on love in the *Phaedrus* begins. Socrates, however, will be speaking “covering my head,” implying that this is a kind of forced and shameful speech (237a4).

Abstracted from the context of the *Phaedrus*, this first speech of Socrates, representative of the ascetic strain of certain Socratics, could have been easily inserted into the ninth book of the *Republic*. Socrates defines *erōs* as some kind of desire (“*epithumia tis ho erōs*” (237d3)), a desire in which an “irrational (*aneu logou*)” opinion conquers a correct opinion for the sake of bodily beauties (238b7-c3); characterizes it as loss of rational self-control comparable to

⁴⁰ I suspect this dissuasion of Phaedrus from recitation out of memory might be Socrates’ affectionate attempt to protect Phaedrus from owning as his what will turn out to be a “foolish and impious” (242d7) speech. Reading would keep more distance between Phaedrus and the speech than reciting.

⁴¹ This threat of force to compel Socrates to speak reminds us of the opening episode of the *Republic*, in which Polemarchus, who happens to be Lysias’s brother, playfully forces Socrates with a threat of force: “either prove stronger (*kreittous*) than we are or stay here” (327c9).

madness and contrasted to moderation (241a3-4); and warns against its force of enslaving one's mind. Socrates, doing nothing but stylistically reorganizing Lysias's speech, draws the same conclusion as Lysias: a passionate lover is inferior as a companion of a boy to a self-composed and rational non-lover. The lover's mind is eaten by all-conquering desire, and in his mindless madness, he will treat the boy in the only way such a soul can treat a beautiful body—as an object of predatory desire. Socrates finishes his speech with this warning: “just as wolves love (*agapōsin*) lambs, so the lovers love (*philousin*) boys” (241d1). When we situate this speech in the context of pederastic practices in Athens, Socrates' warning that the imaginary beautiful boy should be wary of his lovers sounds like prudent counsel (except of course that this speech originally belongs to a “clever” pederast). However, his wary warning against lovers also has broader public implications: *erōs* as madness had better be banished from the public space where citizens, or citizens and future-citizens, interact. Rational self-control in suppression of erotic appetite should provide for the safer foundation and modality of civic relations.

This anti-erotic sentiment is readily comparable to the rationalistic sentiment of the *Republic*. Socrates there defines moderation as “conquest of desires (*epithumiōn engkrateia*)” (430e7). The common expression “self-control (*heautou kreittōn*)” signifies this conquest: the better part of the soul, reason, controls the worse one, desire, in an almost militaristic hostility (431a3-6). Socrates' description of the morally wretched and mad *erastēs* in his first speech in the *Phaedrus* overlaps with the tyrant of the ninth book of the *Republic*.

Eros as productive madness: Socrates' palinode

When he finishes the above speech, Socrates says that he will cross the river to leave before he is “obliged to do something worse” by Phaedrus (242a1-2). However, he is obliged to stay instead, not by Phaedrus, but by the daimonion and “a certain voice coming from this very place.” He cannot leave before he “atones for some offence against gods” that his speech made (242c3). He recognizes his offenses clearly now, for “I am indeed a seer (*mantis*) (242c3-4)”—no, “rather the soul itself is in fact like a diviner (*mantikon*)” (242c7). His soul *knows* that the speech was “foolish and impious” (242d7). He will do as a wise ancient poet did for purification (*katharmos*) (243a3-4): offer his “palinode (*palinōdian*)” to Eros before something ominous befalls him for speaking ill of him (243b4-5). To undo the offence of his speech, he needs to speak again. This second time around as he speaks again of love, he will speak “with bare head, no longer covering it in shame” (243b6-7). He hails back the imaginary beautiful boy and begins his second speech.

Love is indeed madness, says Socrates to the boy; but the speech that a non-lover is better than, and should be favored over, a lover “because a lover is a madman, while a non-lover is a moderate man” is “untrue” (244a3-5). The “greatest of the good things among us comes from madness, when it is given as a gift of god (244a7-8)”; love is madness but not all madness is bad. Prophets, poets, and those in the ritualistic trance are all in madness, losing their minds and self-control, when they are possessed by gods (*entheos*) (244). And as they go through madness, “beautiful works” (245b2) are produced that would not have been possible if they had been “moderate” in the sense of guarding one’s rational self-control. The loss of self-control that marks the state of *erōs*, therefore, should not be “feared” (245b2-3).

But what are the “beautiful works” that eros enables us to produce? It is not as apparent as prophetic trance producing prophecy, poetic trance poetry, and ritualistic trance therapy. To

answer this question, Socrates comes up with an allegorical story about the life of the immortal soul traveling through time and different bodies. He is perhaps obliged to give a story rather than a theory because he is speaking to a young boy (see 271b)—or else, he is speaking of something that cannot be spoken of otherwise. As Socrates' story has it, only those souls that had a vision of reality (*ta onta*) can enter the human form (249b5-6). Human beings must be able to form a general perception of species (*eidos*) out of many particular objects to be able to use speech (*logos*) at all (249b6-8). Socrates explains that the process of perceiving the generality of things through the *eidos* is indeed a "recollection" of *ta onta* that our soul had seen before it entered our body (249c1-4). The reason why lovers lose their mind when they see the beautiful boy is because the sight of his beauty reminds in their soul of the real beauty they had seen. The beautiful appearance of the boy is catalyst of recollection; and this recollection is a moment comparable to the divine possession we see in prophets, poets, and those in ritualistic trance. As we recollect, we are possessed, or become enthused (*enthusiasein*) by *ta onta*. Socrates' answer, therefore, is that love, or being erotically enthused at the sight of beautiful bodies, produces—or at least begins the process of—philosophical *understanding* of reality. Philosophy is erotic, or philosophy by nature relies on *erōs*. To expect to become a philosopher without this erotic possession is as absurd as to expect to become a poet "without Muses' madness (*aneu manias Mousōn*)" simply by mastering the theories of poetic skills (245a5-7); "the moderate-minded" can never compete with "the mad" (245a7-8).

It might be questioned, however, whether we should take this speech, which is essentially a mythos told to an imaginary child, seriously. Socrates himself says that it seems to him that everything was spoken "in child's play (*paidia*)," except in two ways (265c8): that they "collected" scattered things into one species (*idea*), and "cut up" the species into different kinds

(265d-e)—namely, they identified the species of madness, and divided it into two kinds, divine and pathological, and again the divine kind into four different kinds, prophecy, therapy, poetry, and *erōs*-cum-philosophy. This division and collection is what Socrates calls the method of “dialectic” (266c1).⁴² But what does this dialectic have to do with *erōs*? Dialectic is a conscious use of one’s rational intellect. One cannot be mad and dialectical at the same time; but is not dialectic a necessary element of philosophy? All these questions commonly point to one difficulty that Socrates’ analogy of philosophy to *erōs* leaves unresolved: whether there is any significant difference between divination and philosophy if indeed both are experience of madness-like divine-possession. Plato should be able to answer this question if he is to guard the supreme worth he insistently awards philosophy. That we accept the speech of the divinely possessed prophet does not necessarily make us think that the prophet *knows* what he speaks. A divinely-possessed person can speak truth without understanding it, and that is why when we have faith in her speech we regard her more as a medium than a conscious producer of that speech.⁴³ Philosophy, however, aims at conscious retention of knowledge.

Erotic ascent: Diotima’s teaching of Socrates in the Symposium

That Diotima, the “wise” woman who according to Socrates in the *Symposium* “taught” Socrates “erotics (*ta erōtika*)” (201d3-5), sounds as if she is a prophetess interests us in light of the above review of the *Phaedrus*. If she is a prophetess indeed, she is a special prophetess, who speaks in the manner of the “accomplished wise people (*teleoi sophistai*)” (208c1): she knows

⁴² This is a different definition of “dialectic” from that Socrates proposes in the *Republic* (511b-c).

⁴³ Plato raises this same question about poets in the *Ion*.

what she speaks. We might as well expect a wise prophetess to help us understand the difference between divination and philosophy.

Diotima's teaching of love distinguishes itself from Socrates' second speech in the *Phaedrus* in that she directs our attention to what we *do* in love, rather than what *happens* to us in love. The theme of madness in the *Phaedrus* has led Socrates to emphasize the passive aspect of love. The benefit of *erōs*, therefore, was represented as "a gift of god" (244a7-8). Diotima takes a different strategy, denying that Eros is a god at all (202c1-2). Diotima unequivocally tells Socrates that Eros, by nature, "has no share in the beautiful and good (*tōn kalōn kai agathōn amoiros*)" (202d5). The Mantinean, nevertheless, will teach Socrates how Eros, and all lovers possessed of his power and acting like him, will still be able to "share in (*metechei*)" (208b2-3) the good and beautiful, in which they ontologically have no share (*amoiros*). This benefit of *erōs* she will illustrate through the power of Eros, not a god but "a great daimonion" in-between the mortal and the immortal (202d13).

Due to his very nature as intermediary, Eros has a power (*dunamis*) of shuttling between what he is in-between, "interpreting and carrying" messages (202e3), but "anything he finds his way to always slips away" (203e4), Diotima says. Philosophers, we can infer, by virtue of their love of wisdom will find themselves enacting this power of Eros in their relation to truth as well, always running toward it without being able to possess it forever. Diotima, however, does not leave us with a sense of the uselessness and purposelessness of our erotic pursuit of truth. She knows that *erōs* is the very desire "to possess the good forever" (206a11-12). The "use (*chreian*) of love for humans" (204c8) that Socrates asks to learn should be found in "the deed (*ergon*)" love makes us perform when we are captivated by this very erotic desire (206b3). Diotima then gives Socrates an enigmatic answer that dumbfounds Socrates (206b9-10): seized by the erotic

desire to possess the good and beautiful forever, we “give birth in beauty” (206b7-8). It is impossible for mortals to possess the eternal being of beauty forever even as we desire to. It is beyond our nature, being *amoiros* of immortality, the unchanging, pure, and un-embodied. However, there is a human, or mortal, way of fulfilling this impossible desire for immortality: “what is immortal in mortal life” (206c7) lies in the act of begetting (*genēsis*), Diotima explains, “because it always leaves behind a new other in place of the old one” (207d2-3). Some give birth in bodies, others in souls; either way, it is as if we are all pregnant (208e), carrying within us what we can beget in the presence of beauty and leave behind. *Erōs* is the force that hooks us into an encounter with beauty, motivates us into productive action, and serves our desire to possess the good and beautiful forever by generating something out of us to leave behind.

According to this idea of erotic begetting, which is centrally located in the teaching of Diotima, and which Socrates reports Diotima authoritatively affirmed “like *teleoi sophistai*” (208c1), our experience of love can be schematically divided into two moments. We are erotically aroused at the sensuous perception of beauty, and we are erotically inspired to make a productive act of generating tangible bodies and intangible effects in its presence. At the un-prescribable moment when someone or something *strikes* us as beautiful, the passion of *erōs* arises. It culminates, however, not in making that beautiful object ours, but in giving birth to what is within us.⁴⁴ The experience of *erōs* is our encounter with the world, the things in it that suddenly reveal their beauty to us, but it is also our own revelation of who we are to the world through the *ergon* (work) of *genēsis*. We note that Diotima brings back the theme of inspired productivity in

⁴⁴ Markus (1971, 140) casts this as a transition from lack and possession to “super-abundance” and giving.

the *Phaedrus*, but in a way that knits together the passive dimension of it with the more active dimension of our action.

Once Diotima has defined the nature and power of *erōs* as well as its use for humans, as requested by Socrates, she finally invites him to be “initiated into erotics” (209e5-210a1). Whether Socrates will be capable of making it through to the “final and highest” stage of it, Diotima simply cannot foretell (210a1-2); but she will stint no effort, on her part, to help lead him upward to the end, at least in speech (210a3-4).⁴⁵ A lover “*ought (dei)*” first begin with the love of one beautiful body; and in love he begets beautiful *logos* (210a4-7).⁴⁶ With his eyes opened to the beauty of one body, however, he must realize the kinship between all physical beauties (210a8-b1). Once he conceives the notion that the beauty of all bodies is one and the same, this intellectual realization has two opposite effects on his passion of *erōs*: he becomes “a lover of all beautiful bodies” (210b4-5) and “lets go of (*chalsai*)” his zealous devotion to “one,” which is just one particular instance of the species of physical beauty, disdain and regarding such a zeal as “petty (*smikron*)” (210b5-6).

As one ascends on the “ladder” of love (211c3), and as what passionately enchants him changes from body to soul to science (*epistēmē*), he repeats this process of passionate

⁴⁵ Socrates makes almost exactly same remark to Glaucon in the *Republic* before he makes an exposition of the forms as the end of philosophical pursuit in Book 7 (533a).

⁴⁶ It is noteworthy that Diotima begins the description of her erotics with the verb “*dei*,” which translates to “it is necessary” or “one ought.” This “*dei*” leads a long sentence that describes the whole process of one’s movement from love of one body to many, from body to soul, from soul to science. My analysis that follows is premised on the hypothesis that this “*dei*” embraces both erotic and rational necessity that Socrates distinguishes in the *Republic* only to recognize the latter as legitimate (458d). Otherwise, we will be compelled (by rational necessity) to infer that Diotima and Socrates believe that it is possible that we can find beautiful and feel intense affection to an object simply because we are commanded so to treat it—in other words, that love is a completely pliable desire.

enchantment and rational disenchantment.⁴⁷ The image of ascent is powerfully apt. As one ascends, the vista widens. He gains vision over more beautiful things that are appreciated as beautiful. At the same time, one grows more distant from and less attached to the things that had struck him as beautiful in the beginning. The more things one finds beautiful and lovable, the less one will be attached to any particular one of them. While one's erotic passion swells and shrinks, directed variously and progressively from one to many, and from tangible to increasingly more abstract representation of beauty, his intellectual conception of "beauty," we should note, *invariably expands its reach*. One is enabled to "collect" more diverse examples into the single category of beauty, and also "divide" these examples into discrete sub-species of beauty: this is the "dialectic" method that Socrates defines in the *Phaedrus*. The "end (*telos*)" (210e4) of her erotics is reached, Diotima says, when "all of a sudden" one "catches sight of something wonderfully beautiful by nature," which "always" and absolutely "is" (210e4-5; 211a1-2). This "wonderfully beautiful" sight refers unmistakably to the Platonic *eidōs*, or form. However, its practical implication is far from the injunction to turn away from the false beauties of this world.

A comparison of Diotima's teaching of erotic ascent with the even more famed cave allegory of the *Republic* will help us clarify its practical implication that is quite different from the ascetic and cynical implication of the latter, which compels one to turn away from the false representations of reality that abound in the city. The image of ascent ultimately for the vision of the eternal and absolute *idea* of beauty that Diotima draws in the *Symposium* certainly reminds us of the philosopher's ascending escape from the cave that Socrates describes in the *Republic*.

⁴⁷ J. M. E. Moravcsik (1971) systematically breaks down the repeated pattern of the passionate and rational movements alternating in the Socratic erotics, effectively demonstrating that Socrates' erotics is not reducible to either spontaneous passion or rational decision but is marked by the constant interplay between the two.

The cave allegory and Diotima's erotics, however, have almost opposite practical implications. Diotima's ascent does not involve, imply, or require that we deny or deprecate the beauty of the things that we had seen at a lower rung of the ladder as unreal or false. On the contrary, we can ascend to the highest vantage point on beauty only by constantly and continuously loving and finding more beautiful things, "beholding beauties successively and correctly" as she puts it (210e3). Our ascent does not render beautiful bodies, souls, practices, laws, and sciences, of whose beauty we successively come to appreciate, un-beautiful, although it progressively decreases the relative significance they can register in the economy of our passion. Diotima's ascent leaves us with a world that has revealed its beauty in all its perceivable and intelligible forms, from physical to metaphysical, all of which are eventually subsumed under the finally beheld *idea* of beauty, if it can indeed be beheld by us. It is a world one can appreciate to "give birth to and nurture true virtue" (212a) within.

Compare the lover ascending on the Diotimic ladder of erotics to the philosopher of the *Republic* who makes it out of the cave, who then finds nothing that attracts him back to the dark cave of dim images and uncanny echoes and therefore should be "forced" to go back into it (519c). Socrates has nothing else to say to him in persuasion than that his returning descent is a fair return payment for those who "forced" him out of the cave (520b-c). Socrates, however, admits that a philosopher as he describes him would rather "urge upwards and spend time there" than "practice human things" (517c8-9); for philosophy consists in "moving on from forms to forms and ending in forms, making no use of anything sensuously perceivable" (511c1-2). In the *Republic*, "the power of dialectic" is equated with one's ability to "relinquish his eyes and other senses" (537d5-7). This philosophical ethos of the *Republic* is framed by a dichotomous hostility between sense perception (*aisthēsis*) and understanding (*noēsis*), which is reproduced at

the political level as the separation between the common people and the philosophers and consequent privation of the former from a share in political power. Diotima's teaching, on the contrary, dismantles this mechanical opposition between *aisthēsis* and *noēsis*, and shows philosophy as a process of the mutual interchange of stimuli and dis-stimuli between reason and erotic desire that is mediated by *aisthēsis*.

Diotima closes her teaching of Socrates in erotics with a rhetorical question that reminds us of Socrates' casual exchange with Aristodemus, which ended with Aristodemus's demand that Socrates prepare a good excuse for bringing along "a common (*phaulos*) man" like himself: could one call this lover's life, having seen the beauty itself and begotten and nurtured true virtue, *phaulos* (212a)? It is of course not that Socrates is suggesting that Aristodemus is the accomplished lover begetting true virtue Diotima describes here. But Socrates' speech at least has an effect of strongly dissuading us from making a hasty moral judgment of him, or of anyone, for that matter. While Socrates would never abandon the moral criterion of good and beauty to discriminate between moral superiority and inferiority, he would not mistake eloquence, riches, good looks and good birth for moral superiority. He would suspend that judgment until Aristodemus, Agathon, or even his own self has had proper care, education, and much experience to learn the riches of life's beauty necessary for full development of his intellectual and moral potential. This moral agnosticism toward the other person as well as toward our own selves that Socrates implicitly, or unwittingly, promotes, discouraging our intellectual and moral conceit, could be Socrates' excuse for Aristodemus's sake. Not that Aristodemus is an accomplished virtuous person, but that none of us human beings can be denigrated for being incapable of making a journey pursuing intellectual and moral excellence. Socrates' nonchalant invitation of the uninvited Aristodemus to Agathon's dinner with a

provocative suggestion of moral and intellectual equality between Aristodemus, Agathon, and himself in the beginning of the *Symposium*, in that regard, can be read as a provocative invitation to reassess the political judgment of the *Republic*'s banishment of democratic liberty.

Conclusion: Erotic philosophy and republican constitution

The constitution of the *Republic* is the soul of a philosopher writ large. Plato believes that a philosophical soul is the most just and happiest soul, and that the same principle of order applies to the individual soul and to a political entity. This set of beliefs forms an unchanging tenet of Plato's political philosophy that we find in the *Laws* as well. However, the constitutions of the *Republic* and *Laws* are very different. Much of this difference stems from their radically different attitude toward liberty: the one rejects it and the other embraces it. We reviewed Socrates' speeches on *erōs* as well as the dramatic settings that contextualize them, looking to find an explanation for the difference, for with these speeches Plato comes back to the question what it means for us to philosophize. The theory of love in Socrates' speeches, as well as the dramatic circumstances that establish a certain mellow humor toward what belongs to the category of irrationality—the sensuous, the conventional and the common—disrupts the pronounced ascetic and rationalist tendency of the *Republic*. Philosophy is presented in Socrates' erotic dialogues as rational embrace of the irrational and uncontrollable productivity of desire that is mediated by physical sensations. The mixed constitution of the *Laws* that seeks to combine democracy and monarchy and strike a right balance between liberty and subjection seems to reflect this more subtle understanding of philosophy as a constant interchange between the rational and the irrational.

The political argument for mixed constitution in the *Laws*, however, might have been anticipated already in the *Republic*. If one is going to take the *Republic*'s soul-city parallelism, on one hand, and presentation of philosopher as erotic man, on the other, equally seriously, the rationalist authoritarian political model loses its persuasiveness by the force of the internal logic of the *Republic*. For the asymmetry between the erotic soul and the rigidly rationalistic city becomes unmistakable. Socrates' erotic speeches pursue the idea of erotic philosopher further, providing us an opportunity to re-imagine a philosophical city in a different constitutional form from the one proposed in the *Republic*. We infer from the theory of love in Socrates' speeches in the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* its philosophical endorsement of political equality and liberty, which is different from what we are accustomed to in the modern discourse of equality and liberty. Socrates, without renouncing his high standard for human excellence, promotes moral agnosticism toward other persons and our own selves; and appreciates the necessity of public space in which we reveal and learn who we are through the speeches and actions we make in it.

CHAPTER 2

Love and the Mystery of the Other: Socrates' Erotics in the *Symposium* as Ethics of Liberty

As Plato's *Lysis* begins, Socrates happens to meet a group of cheerful lads on his way from the Academy to the Lyceum. Stopping Socrates, one of the young men, Hippothales, coaxes him to join their group with this lure: "we are quite many and all beautiful (*kaloï*)" (203b3-8). An equally cheerful Socrates demands an assurance from Hippothales: "tell me who the most beautiful one is" (204b1-2). Hippothales responds coyly, "that seems a different one to each of us, Socrates" (204b3). "To you who is it then, Hippothales, tell me that" (204b4), Socrates presses Hippothales, and the coy lad blushes, as if struggling to hide what he cannot and alarmed to have an intimate piece of his heart caught by surprise. To make the blushing lad flush even redder, Socrates then announces to Hippothales: "I might be slight and useless for other things, but somehow from a god-given ability I can quickly tell if and with whom you are in love" (204b8-c2).

Hippothales would have given away the name soon enough without Socrates' prompting (cf. 204c3-d3). The ardent passion of an effervescent young heart does not easily lend itself to secrecy. Yet, when Socrates playfully teases the young lover, boasting of his "god-given ability" on matters of love, he taps a familiar tradition on love—the particular rendering of love as esthetic alertness and fascination. As Sappho, or "the beautiful Sappho" as Socrates calls the poet in the *Phaedrus* (235c3), declares, "the most beautiful things on this black earth" are "whatever one loves."⁴⁸ Hippothales blushes, for he is unable to name the most beautiful one without revealing the most intimate desire of his heart. It "might be that according to the old proverb the beautiful (*to kalos*) is a friend," Socrates suggests, before he explores this hypothesis on love in the inconclusive *Lysis* (216c6-7), where it is, like every other hypothesis in the dialogue, is ultimately dropped as unsatisfactory.

That love is our relation to the beautiful, nonetheless, is a theme that recurs in Plato's presumably 'middle-period' dialogues. In the first instance that Socrates brings up the question of *erōs* in the *Republic*, it is agreed that "the most beautiful is the most lovable" (402d6; also cf. 403c). More pertinently, Socrates explores the nature of love as our relation to the beautiful both in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*, where he gives long speeches on *erōs*. The recurring representation of love as our relation to beauty in Plato's middle-period dialogues has much to do with his preoccupation with the metaphysics of forms in the corresponding period of his career. Socrates portrays beauty as a striking vision, which is the "sharpest of our bodily senses" (*Phaedrus*, 250d), and as a singular category that can bridge between our sensuous and intellectual perception, *aisthēsis* and *noēsis*, on the ground that the good is also beautiful (*Lysis*,

⁴⁸ Sappho, fragment 16. Socrates names Sappho as one of the "ancient wise men and women who have spoken about this subject [i.e., *erōs*]" and would reprimand Socrates if he had joined Phaedrus in praising Lysias for a speech that denounces *erōs* for its madness (235a-b).

216d; also *Symposium*, 201c).⁴⁹ On the premise that love is our relation to beauty, Plato looks into the human condition and possibilities of philosophy: insofar as our nature is irreducibly erotic, an inherently philosophical potential, or even an urge—tapped by a striking esthetic vision of a particular other and culminating in the intellectual-moral grasp of the *idea* of the good itself—can be hypothesized.

Socrates in the *Symposium* delivers this vision of philosophy-cum-*erōs* via love-enthused esthetic sensations especially effectively, with an image of the lover's eventual ascent toward “the beautiful *idea* itself, pure, clean, unmixed, and not infected with the human flesh and colors and other many mortal nonsenses” (211e1-3). This peculiar vision of love and philosophy, however, has elicited much critical analysis in the contemporary Plato scholarship that suspects an intrinsically anti-political and anti-democratic bias in its intellectual-moral aspiration. Gregory Vlastos, for instance, sees in the impetus to rise above the imperfect and partial manifestations of beauty in particular persons toward its pure form an inevitable ethical depreciation of unique individuals as worthy objects of love and proceeds to suggest a strong philosophical affinity between such a theory of love and the ruthlessly rationalist-authoritarian political vision of the *Republic*.⁵⁰ Some of the most careful readers of Plato's *Symposium* likewise point to the intimate connection between the philosophical aspiration toward the absolute *idea* Socrates' speech in the *Symposium* showcases and the apparent hostility of

⁴⁹ Also see *Phaedrus* 458d where beauty is presented as the trigger of “recollection” of the transcendental order of *ta onta*, presenting beauty as a sensual perception that leads to intellectual enlightenment.

⁵⁰ Vlastos (1973). Vlastos contrasts Socrates' approach to Kantian humanitarianism—which he favors—that treats each individual as “an end in himself” (10). I take his critique of Socrates/Plato to be representative of the modern Western liberal way of thinking, in which the ontological primacy of an individual human person supplies a discursive foundation for a reasoned justification of liberal democratic regime. I am skeptical, however, if philosophical individualism is the only, or the best, discursive avenue for getting us to the appreciation of democratic liberty as a constitutional principle and way of life.

Socrates in the *Republic* toward liberty and its inevitable consequence of diversity in the city.⁵¹ These scholars point out in agreement that the philosophical yearning for the *idea* celebrated by Socrates in the *Symposium* renders the lover-of-wisdom particularly inadequate as a lover of political liberty and plurality in the city.⁵² Bringing our attention to the apparent language of communion (*sunousia*) with the *idea* of beauty toward the end of the speech (211c-d), they suggest that the philosophic unity of love with the *idea* cannot but abstract the philosopher from the complex, diverse, and less beautiful world of the mundane city.

In this essay, however, I propose an alternative reading of Socrates' speech in the *Symposium* that highlights how the *idea* of beauty enables Socrates critically to reappraise the conventional notion of love as static unity and identity with a love-object, to replace it with a theory of love as generative dynamics, in which none can claim seamless unity with, and thus perfect possession and complete knowledge of, the other. The absolute being of beauty in Socrates' speech serves as an ultimate discursive guard against the allure and illusion of unity, identity, and static singularity imagined as an idealized modality of love for humans.⁵³ Taking it for a philosophical and superior substitute object of love that we are touted to become one with in lieu of the persons and things of the mundane world is to miss what Socrates presents as his (or Diotima's) original contribution in the theory of love predicated on the acknowledgment of

⁵¹ Martha C. Nussbaum (1986); Arlene W. Saxonhouse (1992); and Allan Bloom (1993).

⁵² Both Saxonhouse and Nussbaum, however, raise the question whether Plato is espousing or tactfully presenting the pitfalls of the attempt to collapse the distinction between the principles of philosophical endeavor and practicable political program in the *Symposium* as a whole.

⁵³ Paul Shorey (1978, 18-9) characterizes Plato's philosophical definition of virtue in relation to "an ultimate standard or ideal of good" as "a regulative conception than a practical possibility." Richard Hunter (2004) also urges in a similar vein a more careful and imaginative reading of Socrates' speech in the *Symposium*. My reading of Socrates' speech below will emphasize what practical ethical effects Socrates' representation of *erōs* in relation to the *idea* of the good could be, even as the ultimate "communion" with the idea is a practically impossible prospect for most of us, as the *Symposium* reminds us not only with Socrates' speech but also with the subsequent speech by Alcibiades. I will return to this subject toward the end below.

the impossibility for mortal human life to possess what is immortal (208b). *To kalos*, initially presented *as if* an object of love (204d-206b), leads Socrates/Diotima to abandon the ideal of erotic unity and instead adopt the generative model (206e). Consequently, a dynamics, in which our sense of individual identity and of the world we inhabit expands through what we come to see, produce, take care of, and share in our love of the other, replaces the stasis of unity as a lived modality of *erōs* for humans. I propose that this generative model of love that sheds light on how we come to both make and learn the world thanks to our encounters with the others, whose mystery we cannot exhaust even in the bond of love, provides a valuable discursive resource to imagine an ethics of liberty that knits together appreciation of unique individuality and the speeches and actions expressive of it, on one hand, and humility and aspiration toward truth, on the other, as inter-dependent dispositions of mind.⁵⁴ The ethical lesson we can derive from Socrates' speech in the *Symposium* is emphatically not that we can, do and should indiscriminately embrace all humanity in passionate love, but that as we come to see who we are, who we might be and cannot but be because of the spontaneous psychic force of love, we learn to appreciate both the aspirations and frailties our speeches and actions exhibit, as well as the unfathomable residue of mystery that will remain nonetheless in the world, in others, and in our own selves.

To bring forth in sharper relief Socrates' polemic against the erotic ideal of unity and singularity, I will preface my analysis of Socrates' speech below with a reflection on one of the most salient dramatic props of the *Symposium*—the rivalry between Aristophanes and Socrates,

⁵⁴ Morris B. Kaplan (1997) and Mary Nichols (2009) also propose to read Socrates' speech on love in the *Symposium* as a discursive resource for our imagination of democratic political processes. Nichols emphasizes the opening up of a space for action and interaction, while Kaplan emphasizes the indeterminacy of identities Socrates' narrative of erotic encounters highlights. My argument in this chapter is closely aligned with Kaplan's.

which thematically I trace back to the *Lysis*. Plato ascribes to Aristophanes in the *Symposium* a representation of love as an idealized unity between the two who yearn to be “made into one,” as they naturally belong to each other (192e1). The distance between the Aristophanic erotic telos of becoming one with the beloved other and Socratic communion with the beautiful *idea* that eventuates in the lover’s “giving birth to...true virtue” shall turn out to be great (212a3-5).

“*The only thing I say I know is ta erōtika*”

As the last encomiast of Eros in the *Symposium*, Socrates finishes his speech to applauding cheers of the audience—with the exception of Aristophanes (212c4-6): the comic poet attempts to respond to the critical remark Socrates has made in reference to his speech (205d10-e5). Aside from his disagreement with Aristophanes, however, Socrates seems to have earned from the rest of the symposiasts a validation of his expertise in “erotic things (*ta erōtika*),”⁵⁵ which he had claimed earlier in the night (177e, 198d). That Socrates prefaces his speech with a confident claim of his own knowledge in the subject-matter is unique against his infamous habit of insisting on ignorance.⁵⁶ Yet, Socrates’ unflinching good faith in his own knowledge of love is unique even against Plato’s two other similarly themed works, the *Phaedrus* and the *Lysis*. We indeed see an unusually merry and enchanted Socrates in the *Phaedrus*, in which Socrates listens to a speech that is “in a way about love” (227c4-5) and proceeds to offer two speeches on love himself. As we have seen above, the *Lysis* likewise

⁵⁵ *Ta erōtika* is a neuter plural construction as in *ta politika* that can be literally rendered as “political things” but also lends itself to such translations as politics or the political art. I will use below erotic things, erotics, and the art of love alternately—and progressively according as the narrative of Socrates’ speech gradually crystalizes the significance of “*ta erōtika*” into something of an art.

⁵⁶ C.D.C. Reeve (2006), however, takes it as no more than a simple play on the similarity between the noun *erōs* and the verb *eraotan* (to ask questions), which “seem to be etymologically connected” (p. xix).

begins with a playful Socrates tauntingly boasting of “a god-given ability” in love at the expense of an embarrassed lad-in-love (204c1-2). We may infer that the pleasurable excitement—if tinged in painful anxiety—we associate with, and experience in, love giddies the mind, as the occasion arises for one to muse about it. Love, as a subject of speech, may relax and temper the humor of the speaker, just as wine inebriates the mind with pleasure (cf. *Laws*, 649d).⁵⁷ The initial excitement and pleasure of speaking about love, however, fade away in both the *Phaedrus* and the *Lysis* to give way to a somber skepticism. In the *Phaedrus*, a work that divides itself into two parts with the enchanted first devoted to love and the sober second to rhetoric and writing, Socrates in the second part reflects on his own speeches in the first part, to discount most of them as “spoken jestingly in play (*paidia*)” (265c8-9). In the *Lysis*, the playfully confident Socrates is replaced toward the end with a somberly uncertain and weary Socrates, whose very last words are an anticlimactic admission of ignorance: “what a friend is not yet have we been able to find out” (223b7-8).⁵⁸

Socrates in the *Symposium* is different. When the topic of love is proposed, with a suggestion that everyone take turns to speak in praise of Eros, Socrates welcomes it: for “nothing else I say I know but *ta erōtika*” (177d). Moreover, Socrates’ confidence does not waiver. He finishes his speech, which putatively is a recount of his lesson in *ta erōtika* from a Mantinean woman named Diotima (201d), with this assertion: “This is what Diotima told me and I am

⁵⁷ Incidentally, speeches on love are substitutes for wine in the *Symposium*. (cf.176b-d)

⁵⁸ This aporetic or inconclusive ending is a common feature in many of Plato’s ‘Socratic’ dialogues that are mainly eristic searches for definition (e.g. the *Protagoras* and *Laches*). Paul Shorey (1971, 23) argues against using these aporetic dialogues as a “basis to infer ‘development’ in Plato’s philosophy.” As for the *Lysis*, he claims that “The failure to establish a formal definition and the Socratic avowal of ignorance at the end prove nothing” about Plato’s own theory of love, much less the “development” of his theory of love. While I have no intention to argue that Socrates’ speech in the *Symposium* should be regarded as representative of “Plato’s own theory of love,” I note a repeated treatment of the same problematic made in the *Lysis* and *Symposium*. A fuller and sharper articulation of the problem, if not the solution, is offered in the later *Symposium*. The following section in review of the *Lysis* will shed light on the continuity of the problematic that is shared between the *Symposium* and *Lysis*.

convinced of (*pepeismai*). Being convinced I try to convince others... and I myself honor and especially train (*askō*) in *ta erōtika*” (212b1-6). Diotima’s teaching concerning love largely consists of two stages. The first is her exposition of what *erōs* is: Diotima defines love by explaining to Socrates its “power (*dunamin*)” (202e2), “use for humans (*chreian tois anthropois*)” (204c8), and “cause (*aition*)” (207a7). For without “understanding” these essential aspects of the nature of love, one cannot hope to “become expert in *ta erōtika*,” Diotima tells Socrates as if chastening his naivety (207c2-4). The second stage unfolds in the famed long penultimate paragraph of Socrates’ speech, where the scheme of Diotima’s *erōtika* is revealed (210a-212a). In an uninterrupted sweep, Diotima instructs Socrates how one “ought to” proceed “correctly” in the experience of love toward its final *telos* (201a4). Apparently, Socrates has so much confidence in his learning of this erotics that he makes it a rule to “especially train in” it himself and “try to convince others” to join him in practicing the same (212b2-3, 6). Nothing clouds his confidence, nor does Socrates betray any sign of uncertainty.⁵⁹

Especially suggestive is the contrasting humor of Socrates regarding his own knowledge of love in the *Symposium* and in the *Lysis*. These are two of Plato’s works devoted to the question of love—with the *Lysis* presumably earlier in composition than the *Symposium*. Socrates in the *Lysis* tries what we can dub prototypes of two rival theories on love in the *Symposium*, which Plato ascribes respectively to Aristophanes and to Socrates—love of the beautiful, for the one, and love of one’s own (*to oikeion*), for the other.⁶⁰ These two alternative hypotheses of love appear in the *Lysis* as the last two hypotheses that Socrates considers while

⁵⁹ However, Aristophanes’ aborted attempt to protest, which is silenced not by applause for Socrates but by the entrance of Alcibiades’ drunken party, makes us anticipate that a certain conditions and considerations that could qualify Socrates’ certainty might emerge through the speeches and actions of Alcibiades later.

⁶⁰ The hypothesis of love as attraction between the opposites also appears in both dialogues, attributed in the *Symposium* to the physician Eryximachus.

ultimately adopting neither as he seeks in vain through several hypotheses for a definition of a friend. In the following section, I will make brief excursion into the *Lysis*, to survey Socrates' treatment of these last two hypotheses and its dramatic circumstances. It will help us put the speeches by Aristophanes and Socrates in the *Symposium* into perspective for a following analysis.

The last two hypotheses of the Lysis: to kalos and to oikeion as friend

The dialogue in earnest on the topic of love in the *Lysis* begins with the appearance of the namesake boy, the beloved of Hippothales. Lysis actually stands out among the group (206e9-207a2) and strikes Socrates as one “deserving not only to be called beautiful but beautiful and good (*kalos te kayathos*)” (207a2-3).⁶¹ Having overcome his initial embarrassment, Hippothales had asked Socrates for advice on how one should interact with the beloved to court his affection (206c2-3); “if you are willing to have him talk with me, perhaps I could demonstrate to you how one should converse,” Socrates responded (206c4-6). Once Lysis enters the scene, Socrates suavely attracts the demure but intent boy's attention to launch with him (and his closest friend and peer Menexenus) an investigation on the meaning of love (*philia*). We have noted above that this investigation ends in an inconclusive aporia. Yet, does Socrates somehow succeed, for Hippothales' sake, in demonstrating how to woo by speeches such a “beautiful and good” youth as Lysis, whose precocious philosophical propensity impresses Socrates (cf. 213d)?

⁶¹ *Kalos te kagathos*: literally beautiful and good, but an idiomatic expression in appreciation of nobility in character.

Skipping for now the eristic examination through several hypotheses in search of the conceptual identity of a friend, to look ahead toward the ending, we find a rather jarring irony as an answer to the above question—presented not so much in speeches as in a peculiar dramatic unfolding. Socrates reports that he found Hippothales, as a matter of fact, in sheer exultation: he “beamed every color in delight” (222b2). Socrates also reports, however, that Lysis, having eagerly followed him so far, suddenly “fell silent” and “scarcely managed a nod” (222a4; 222b1). Socrates’ discourse at this point toward the end of the dialogue apparently has failed to win over Lysis, leaving the “beautiful and good” boy in a state of barely restrained dejection and resistance. Hippothales, the boy’s pursuer, nevertheless exults as if Socrates had indeed shown him how to court the lovely boy. The pronounced contrast in the reaction of Lysis the philosophical younger boy and of Hippothales his elder pursuer indicates an apparent failure in communication between each of them and Socrates, anticipating Socrates’ languid acknowledgement of ignorance on the question of love, soon to follow at the very end of the *Lysis*. On the other hand, Socrates’ observation of Lysis’s dejection, in contrast to Hippothales’s exultation, creates an uneasy dramatic suspense, raising an alarm in respect to the last hypothesis on love Socrates at the moment was proposing as if coming to a sound conclusion—that love is desire for one’s own, *to oikeion*.

Lysis’ dejection and Hippothales’ delight are both responses to a series of remarks Socrates has made about his final hypothesis on what friendship might be: the attraction to and desire for one’s own. What turns out to be love (or “*ho te erōs kai hē philia kai hē epithumia*”), Socrates speaks as if coming to a conclusion, is “indeed of one’s own (*tou oikeiou dē*)” (221e3-4). This desire of what is *oikeios* stems from our deficiency or lack (*endeia*) (221d7), as if *to oikeion* were “something taken away from us (*ti aphairētai*)” (221e2-3). Therefore, Socrates

concludes, “it has become manifest that we must love (*anagkaion philein*) what indeed belongs to us by nature,” (222a5-6), adding that “the genuine, not the feigned, lover must be loved (*anagkaion phileisthai*) by the boy” (222a6-7). Then, Socrates takes note of the opposite reception by Hippothales and Lysis of his conclusion; and on his part, he immediately comes to point out the logical difficulties with this attempt at defining love along the vein of *to oikeion*. Consequently, this last hypothesis is dropped as well; and the *Lysis* ends in suspense—not only for its aporetic inclusiveness but also for the unaddressed and unexplained unease of the namesake boy of noble character and philosophical penchant, all the more uncanny because of its stark contrast to the great joy of his pursuer. As we shall presently see below, the logical core of this final hypothesis on love in the *Lysis* reappears in the *Symposium*, albeit charmingly refurbished by Aristophanes the comedic dramatist.

We find in the *Lysis* an unmistakable prototype of Diotima’s teaching of *erōs* to Socrates as well, which comes right before the above proto-Aristophanic definition of love. After rejecting several hypotheses, Socrates feigns himself to be a mantic to propose another definition of a friend: “now I speak waxing prophetic that what is neither good nor bad is a friend of the beautiful and the good” (216d3-4). Socrates defines love as our desire of the good on account of the bad because we are by nature “in between the bad and the good” (220d4-6); but he also proposes the logical necessity of “the first friend (*ho prōton philon*)”—the *idea* of the good. Due to the natural imperfection, those neither good nor bad but in-between desires the good—not this or that particular examples of the good, but its absolute *idea* that imparts goodness to all the concrete persons and things we find to be good. This definition of love as yearning by those neither good nor bad but in-between for the consummate good and beauty, comes very close to the theory of love Diotima teaches to Socrates in the *Symposium*. Yet, Socrates in the *Lysis*

abandons it. After a lengthy treatment begun with Socrates offering “it might be right according to the old proverb the beautiful is a friend...for I say the good is beautiful” (216c6-d2), Socrates puts it aside. For he suspects there should be a cause of love that is unmixed with “the bad,” a source of the desire for “the good” that will remain even after “the bad” has been eliminated (221b-c). Therein, Socrates shifts ground to propose the last hypothesis of the *Lysis* on friendship that suggests “some other cause of loving (*philein*) and being loved” (221d1-2)—the above reviewed *oikeion*.

By the time it becomes obvious that the hypothesis that *to oikeion* is a friend is unsatisfactory too, Socrates complains of “growing groggy (*methuomen*) from the argument” (222c2). This weary, non-committal, and uncertain Socrates of the *Lysis* encourages us to search for the reason why the Socrates of the *Symposium*, in contrast, displays vigor, commitment and self-assurance about his understanding of love, even exhorting his audience to join him in upholding and practicing his (or Diotima’s) brand of erotics. For Plato in the *Symposium* revisits the last two hypotheses of the *Lysis*—the beautiful (*to kalos*) and what is one’s own (*to oikeion*) as a friend—now attributing each respectively to a poet and a philosopher, who are well aware of their differences and vie to persuade the audience.

Aristophanes’ speech in the Symposium

Plato in the *Symposium* presents a mutually acknowledged, if not necessarily hostile, rivalry between Aristophanes and Socrates. Among the other five encomiasts of Eros in the *Symposium* besides Socrates, Aristophanes is the only speaker who pleads with the audience to propagate his theory of love (189d), to parallel Socrates’ professed enthusiasm to “convince

others” about what “I am convinced” about love (212b). Socrates, when it comes to his turn to speak, addresses Aristophanes’ account of love in a pointed criticism: “there is a certain argument, according to which those who seek their own halves are lovers: but my argument says love is neither of a half nor of a whole, unless it somehow also happens to be good” (205d-e). When Socrates’ speech finishes to applauding cheers of the others, Aristophanes alone tries to respond to what Socrates has spoken “on his own speeches” (212c). For that “certain argument” about love of one’s own half is obviously Aristophanes’. Aristophanes, however, does not get a chance to respond, his voice muted by the noise not of the applauses for Socrates, but of the apparent “revelers” making a sudden entry, who turn out to be Alcibiades’ drunken party (212c). Alcibiades is made the last speaker of the *Symposium* by Eryximachus’s intervention to stop him from degenerating their speech-party into a drinking-party (213e-c). When Alcibiades thus takes the intended place of Aristophanes, now robbed of a chance to return his own response to Socrates, Alcibiades proceeds to “speak in praise of Socrates,” (214d) ironically offered in an apparent style of public indictment of Socrates’ *hubris*—and he quotes Aristophanes’ jeering description of Socrates in the *Clouds*, expressly addressing the comic poet (221b1-4).

The rivalry between Socrates and Aristophanes serves as an important structural hinge of the *Symposium* that divides the drama into before and after Aristophanes. Alcibiades is not the only one whose dramatic persona in the *Symposium* is colored, if ironically, in relation to Aristophanes. Aside from the first encomiast Phaedrus, who takes a specially privileged place in the *Symposium* as a “father of our subject” (177d5), all the main speakers in the *Symposium* are implicated in this structural prop in one way or other. Not so much by injurious words as by loud bodily noises of hiccups and sneezes, Aristophanes deprecates the smug and sententious speeches of Pausanias and Eryximachus who speak before him. Exaggerated discordance

between the protagonists' hyperbolic conceit and the absurdly trivial nature of their conduct on stage is a characteristic formula of Aristophanes' comedies. Plato cleverly recreates that same formula in honor of the poet he deploys as a character of his own drama, who happens to have unstoppable hiccups and must force himself to sneeze violently as a cure for them during the moralistic speeches of Pausanias and Eryximachus.⁶² If Pausanias and Eryximachus raise some valid concerns to be considered as we seek to understand the nature of *erōs*, such as the passion's potential tension with virtue and reason, it seems they do so with a certain air of unreflective superficiality and therefore deserve the accidental bodily noises of Aristophanes sounding as a backdrop to their speeches.⁶³

Eryximachus expresses his general sympathy for Pausanias' discourse and wishes to "put a completion to [Pausanias'] argument" (186a1-2). That we end up hearing the like-minded speeches of Pausanias and Eryximachus back-to-back is also thanks to Aristophanes. His hiccups prevent him from speaking in his expected turn after Pausanias according to the seating order and compel him to switch turns with Eryximachus (185c-d). Consequently, two poets, Aristophanes and Agathon, and Socrates are lumped together as the latter half of Eros-encomiasts in the *Symposium*. The two poets and Socrates turn out to be the last three who drink and converse into daybreak at the end of the *Symposium* (223c). Being "the mightiest drinkers," as Eryximachus put it in the beginning of the night (176c2-3), however, is not the only mark that distinguishes the last three encomiasts of Eros. Notwithstanding the great differences and variety in argument and style, a new and common theme emerges in their praises of Eros: Eros as *hēgemōn* (cf. 193b, 197d-e, 210a)—a theme that challenges a rationalist-moralistic scheme of

⁶² See Bloom (1993, 102-104) for a discussion of Plato's use of comedic instruments in the *Symposium*.

⁶³ Michel Foucault (1990, 229, 246), characterizes the speeches before Aristophanes' as "pastiche" or "reference" speeches that represent typical discourses on love circulating in Plato's contemporary culture.

putting a regulative reign on the force of *erōs* for the purpose either of virtue, as in Pausanias' speech, or of (cosmic) health, as in Eryximachus' speech, and that compels us to reflect on the dynamics of human agency not wholly susceptible rationalization.

As the fourth and central speaker of the *Symposium*, Aristophanes begins his speech offering that we “ought to learn first the human nature and its afflictions (*pathēmata*)” in order to understand the true “power of love” (189d). The preceding speakers, he implies, did not seem to perceive this profundity—that love is a phenomenon that penetrates the core of our nature and the kind of experiences in life we have to passively suffer. With this, Aristophanes ups the ante: insofar as there is a rivalry between him and Socrates in respect of the grasp of the nature of love, its stakes are as high as they can be in a rivalry between a poet and a philosopher (c.f. *Republic*, 607b): whose art is better equipped to produce happiness (*eudaimonia*) in human life, both individually and politically, given human nature as it is and human experience of life as it is lived? The best “workmate with the human nature,” as Socrates puts it (212b), and “the greatest hope of all,” as Aristophanes puts it (193d), for *eudaimonia* is Eros; but as to precisely how it is so, Aristophanes and Socrates each offers a different account, for their respective representations of human nature and experience as they relate to *erōs* differ greatly.⁶⁴

Aristophanes' is an engaging story. It ingeniously represents the itching sense of incompleteness and yearning that afflicts the human soul through the physical form of the human body. The speech conjures vivid, and comically ludicrous, images of humans with sphere-shaped bodies and eight nimble limbs, later to be cut as a punishment for their daring against the Olympian gods “like sorb-apples...or eggs” into two halves, with the cut-side skin pulled and

⁶⁴ It is a settled formula of encomium to represent the praised entity as the most conducive agent for *eudaimonia*. Aristophanes and Socrates differ from the other speakers, who all stick with this formula, in that they extend the exploration of *erōs* to the question of human nature and the human condition.

tied together at what makes their wrinkly navel (190d-191a). This physical severance from and loss of original wholeness explains the reason human nature is constitutionally afflicted with a “desire of wholeness,” Aristophanes observes (192e). An encounter with “the half that is one’s own” strikes one with an amazing sensation of “friendship, belonging, and love”; and the lovers “never wish to part from each other, not even for a short time” although they cannot articulate in their soul what it is that they want from each other (192b-c). Aristophanes would enlighten them about the elusive “cause” of their own deepest desire—that the desire derives from “our original nature” (192e), and that its cause is nothing but “the desire and pursuit of the whole.” *Erōs* is the name of this pursuit (193a). Creating “one out of two,” *erōs* “heal[s]” the existential wound of human nature and restores it to its primordial wholeness (191d; 192e). Happiness as an end for “our race,” Aristophanes concludes, requires therefore that we should “bring love to its end (*ektelesaimen ton erōta*)” by reuniting with “our severed original nature” (193c4-5). That is the work of Eros, “our leader and commander (*hēmin hēgemōn kai stratēgos*)” (193b2), who “benefits us the most, drawing us to what belongs to us (*eis to oikeion agōn*)” (193d1-2). This restoration and healing is the “greatest hope of all” for blessedness and happiness (193d).

If Aristophanes presents a speech “different from yours,” as he speaks to Eryximachus the physician at its end (193d7), it charms Eryximachus all the same who finds it a “pleasantly” presented *logos* (193e4). The pleasantness of Aristophanes’ speech might derive no less from the strength of its insight into the nature of love than from its charming use of imagery. Allan Bloom (1993, 104), for instance, considers it “the truest and most satisfying account of Eros that we find in the *Symposium*.” Sigmund Freud (1989, 55), arguably one of the most influential modern theorists on eros, would have agreed with Bloom. Freud’s own representation of eros, or libidinal drive, as a kind of separation anxiety and longing for psychological identity that creates

one out of physical plurality reads very Aristophanic: “the power of love,” as he puts it, “made the man unwilling to be deprived of his sexual object—the woman—, and made the woman unwilling to be deprived of the part of herself which had been separated off from her—her child.” I suspect there is a grain of truth in this representation of love as longing for and attraction to what is naturally one’s own. As the Homeric proverb often cited in Plato’s dialogues has it, “god always draws the like unto the like.”⁶⁵ The spontaneous attraction to what we perceive as likeness to our own is not unknown to us—a sense of ease and belonging readily comes to us when we associate by perceived kinship. If we confine our reflection on love to its narrowest conception of passionate relationship between two sexually attracted persons, the sentimental appeal of Aristophanic love might be still stronger. Bloom even suggests that “no healthy person can fail to want Aristophanes’ account somehow and in some way to be true”; for it “so captures what men and women actually feel when they embrace each other” (111, 105).

All the speeches in the *Symposium*, including that of Alcibiades, however, are also situated in the particular cultural context of the Greek institution of love between a boy and his *paid-erastēs*. There is ample reason why this form of male homosexual love should have elicited much ethical anxiety in the way heterosexual love between two different sexes, perceived to be naturally unequal, would not and did not. The relationship between two males equal by sexual nature but unequal by age keenly raises the issue of the boy’s honor and complicates the courtship ritual to protect the young *erōmenos* from the potential degradation that his youth could invite but the nature of his sex should not accommodate.⁶⁶ Among the six encomiasts of the *Symposium*, Pausanias most expressly addresses this specific challenge. The “not easy to

⁶⁵ E.g. the *Lysis* 214a; the *Symposium* 195b in Agathon’s speech.

⁶⁶ See Foucault (1990, 230-232).

understand” and apparently convoluted “customs” that severely inhibit the boy’s consent while encouraging ostentatious performance of courtship on the part of the lover (182d5), Pausanias suggests, serve to enable the boy to “test” out a fair lover who could offer him a noble love (184a1, 7). The noble kind of love, according to Pausanias, that “our law” promotes (184a1), ensures a certain equity between the boy and his lover by enabling the boy to offer his “willing subjection” only to those who could make him “better either in wisdom or in any other part of virtue” (184c2, 5-6). A sort of fair exchange between sexual favor and supposed education in virtue is the term of equity in this account of a noble love.⁶⁷

Aristophanes, or his Muses, might not have been able to resist the urge to expose the pettiness of this moralistic fair-exchanger’s representation of love with loud and unstoppable hiccups. That does not mean that Aristophanes himself would dodge the question of the boy’s consent to the *paid-esratēs* from an alternative perspective. The Aristophanic alternative, however, is “a bit scandalous,” to borrow Foucault’s words (1990, 232)—Aristophanes “gives an answer that is direct, simple, and entirely affirmative.”⁶⁸ In Aristophanes’ account of *erōs*, there exists no troubling asymmetry of status, power, resources and experience in the erotic relations that we need to address; for when it comes to *erōs*, we are all equally just one half fallen off from the whole eagerly seeking the other half. The boy and the lover are not in need of a complex set of customs that strain to create and protect a certain artificial equity between them—for they are already equal. It all simply comes down to finding the half that is indeed one’s own. The search is best done when we abandon to the leadership of Eros. When we read this account of love as a

⁶⁷ Bloom (1993) puts it bluntly when he says that “this is hardly a praise of Eros, except as a kind of pimp,” p. 93. Later in Alcibiades’ speech, we see Alcibiades in disarming honesty present his younger self in relation to Socrates as such a boy as Pausanias celebrates who was willing to offer sexual favor in exchange for the wisdom he sought to earn from his relationship. To his great dismay, Alcibiades was rejected by Socrates (217a-219d).

⁶⁸ Leo Strauss (2001, 120) also takes note of the interest Aristophanes shares with Pausanias in this regard.

speech of the wooing *erastēs*, as Aristophanes presents it toward the end of his speech, instructing his audience that “we” are to bring our “favorites (*paidika*) to the original nature,” the simple, egalitarian, and spontaneous vision of love sounds neither idyllic nor innocent any longer (193c4-8). We recollect the uneasy silence of Lysis when Socrates drives to the conclusion in the *Lysis* that “it has become manifest that we must love what belongs to us by nature,” adding that “the genuine, not the feigned, lover must be loved by the boy” (222a5-7). What means does Lysis have to separate the “genuine” lover from the “feigned” lover, when both would present themselves with a presumed knowledge of Lysis as their own half that he “must love”—embrace each and all? Is that all the youthful Lysis has to do to learn who he might be and to earn “happiness and blessedness” in life? Either it is too easy, or it is grossly abusive.

Even if we abstract Aristophanes’ speech from the particular cultural context of the *paidika*-and-*paiderastēs* relationship, the poverty of Aristophanes’ account of *erōs* as it relates to human nature and *telos* that would harry a Lysis remains to trouble us. It might only be our piteous pride that has us deny that the only meaningful human interaction in life is to see if the other belongs to us or not; and that once coming into union with one’s own the rest of the world would fall away in sheer irrelevance to our serene happiness. Insofar as this simple view of the human condition falls short of what and who we really are, however, this discourse of love as unity with one’s own lends an alarmingly handy rhetoric of justification to any one and any group that would impose on us a unitary identity and deprive us of the opportunity to explore, learn, and appreciate the complex layers of entanglement of meaning in the world, other persons, and our own selves. This ideal of seamless unity and identity between lovers promotes a marriage between an unreflective affirmation of self and unconditional devotion to the other on

whom the self-same identity is projected. Its vision of love is only as alluring as we are tempted to suppose a transparently one-dimensional human nature and *pathēmata*.

Socrates after the two poets

Socrates is the last encomiast of Eros, speaking after the two poets, Aristophanes and Agathon. Agathon's speech is as stylistically polished as his notorious taste for polished looks.⁶⁹ But it is also as stylistically polished as it is substantively deficient. It is so "wondrously" spoken that "I am at a loss," Socrates admires Agathon with cruel irony (198a6-7). Instead of "speaking the truth" about love as Socrates believed one "ought to" (198d3-4), Agathon "stirred up and attributed every word" of delicacy and refinement to Eros to effect a mere impression that he is praising Eros (198e4-5). Since that is not "my way" (199b1), Socrates is "at a loss" how he should proceed to make his own speech. Only if the others are willing "to hear the truth about Eros spoken," will he will able to speak. He assumes much and feigns no humble ignorance. At the expense of the young tragedian still basking in his first victory two nights before, Socrates alerts the audience to "the truth" about love, which he claims his following speech will offer and implies none of the preceding speakers delivered.⁷⁰

After so much has been said in criticism of Agathon's vacuous phrase-mongering, Socrates picks up one substantive thread rather carelessly, or with the apparent spontaneity of an

⁶⁹ See the opening of the *Symposium* for Socrates' remark on Agathon's beauty (174a). Aristophanes derides the tragedian's tastes for fashion as effeminate in *Thesmophoriazousae*.

⁷⁰ Since the speech is a speech of praise, however, he will "select the most beautiful truths" (198d5). Does it mean that he is leaving out the less beautiful truths about love?

enchanted poet, introduced by Agathon toward the end of his speech.⁷¹ Socrates grants that something was “plausibly (*epieikōs*)” spoken (201a8)—namely, that love is “of beautiful things, for there is no love of ugly things” (201a5; cf. 197b5). Socrates then uses this as the first proposition, or hypothesis, with which to launch his investigation of the “truth” about love. His brief engagement in an elenchus with Agathon results in their return to one of the salient themes of Aristophanes’ speech—that desire testifies to the lack (*endeia*) of the desired object (200b). Insofar as they can posit the beautiful as an object of love as Agathon “plausibly” did, Agathon’s representation of Eros as a beauty himself is untenable. Either Love is not beautiful himself, or Love does not desire the beautiful. Agathon owns his confusion: “It might be that, Socrates, I knew nothing of what I said” (201b11-12). Socrates abruptly commends Agathon in response (201c1): “Yet, you spoke beautifully at any rate, Agathon.” Socrates no longer seems to be playing ironic with Agathon with this praise; on the other hand, his criticism of the tragedian’s failure to fathom the truth about love stands unrevoked all the same.

The short interlude inserted between Agathon’s and Socrates’ speech, which both begins and ends with Socrates praising Agathon invites us to consider the speech of the tragedian for what was indeed “beautifully” spoken in it. Socrates even in his initial ironic praise of Agathon does not praise the beauty of the poet’s speech wholesale: “while the rest was not equally wondrous on one hand, the part on the other towards the end beautiful in its words and phrases” was (198b4-5). Socrates himself, as we have seen above, picks up the idea of love of the beautiful from that last part. Yet, the prevailing and prominent theme of the last part of Agathon’s speech, which progressively turns into enthused lyricism, is not exactly that Eros

⁷¹ Agathon spontaneously begins to speak in poetic meter toward the end of his speech (197c). Both the *Ion* and *Phaedrus* present a theory of enchanted or enthused speech: truth can be spoken, if rather confusedly, through the mouth of a poet who does not understand the truth himself but rather becomes a medium of the Muses.

loves beautiful things, but that Eros is a leader, or *hēgemōn* (197d2, e3), in the production of the beautiful things through his love of beauty. In a formula reminiscent of Socrates' second speech in the *Phaedrus*, Agathon offers that "all goods came to gods and men alike from love of beauty" (197b8-9).⁷² Agathon presents Eros as a beauty that presides at the production of the beautiful things; and this power makes Eros an archetype of a poet in Agathon's speech (196e4). Beauty, poetry and production (the last two of which are covered by the same word *poiēsis* in Greek⁷³) are brought together by Agathon under the category of love. As we will see presently, production, or the generative act of bringing forth something new to the world, is the central theme in Socrates' own speech on love. Socrates remains silent on that theme for now, however, simply acknowledging a certain shade of beauty, which Agathon managed toward the end of his speech even if he "knew nothing of what [he] said" (201c1).

Before Socrates proceeds to launch his own speech, therefore, he has, with his brief dialogue with Agathon, brought to the fore the theme of lack borrowed from Aristophanes and that of love of beauty from Agathon. On the other hand, we have heard from each poet an account of Eros as our guide and leader alternatively toward inter-personal unity or toward beautiful production. Despite the appearance of Socrates correcting Agathon's error in favor of the Aristophanic theme of lack, between the two alternatives each poet offers it is rather the second, Agathon-ian theme of production in relation to beauty that Socrates is going to explore and develop in his speech. Socrates' praise of Agathon is not entirely a cruel irony, nor an empty gesture of civil courtesy, which we rarely see Socrates care much about at any rate in Plato's

⁷² The *Phaedrus*, 244a7-8: "the greatest of the good things among us come through madness, when it is a gift sent by gods."

⁷³ Socrates makes a commentary on this in his following speech (205b-c).

dialogues.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, Agathon has little idea—or so he appears to Socrates—of the truthful relation between beauty and the human faculty of production in erotic human experience.

“Love is, Socrates, not of the beautiful as you suppose”

No sooner does Socrates begin in earnest his encomium of Eros than we learn that he would rather “go through the speech about Eros that I once heard from a Mantinean⁷⁵ woman Diotima, who was wise not only in these but in many other things” (201d1-2). Diotima (literally, God-honor) is the one who “taught me *ta erotika*” (201d5), Socrates explains. Socrates cites as an example of the Mantinean’s wisdom her counsel to Athenians regarding their offering of sacrifice, which “caused the onset of the plague to be delayed ten years” (201d3-5). Her wisdom, then, seems of a prophetic kind—not susceptible to rational corroboration. If the poets Aristophanes and Agathon can invoke their Muses as an ultimate source of authority or authorship, Socrates has a wise prophetess who teaches him with certitude (cf. 208c) and convinces him at any rate (cf. 212d). When Socrates presents Diotima the wise Mantinean as the source of the knowledge he is convinced of, he reminds us that insofar as there is a difference between his

⁷⁴ Socrates admits that he managed to enrage and alienate many whom he conversed with as well as the spectators of these conversations (the *Apology of Socrates*, 21c-e). His nonchalance to the rules of courtesy is seen in the beginning of the *Symposium*, too, when Socrates suggests the uninvited Aristodemus accompany him to Agathon’s banquet (cf. 174a9-d1).

⁷⁵ Mantinea joined the Athenian alliance during the Peloponnesian War despite its Peloponnesian location and was a site of the greatest land battle during the war in 418 BC. The choice of this city as a home of Diotima, who is most likely a fictional character, might not be a sheer accident. Alcibiades’s political rise in Athens is closely related to his successful diplomacy with Mantinea, although the Athenian alliance was eventually defeated in the battle of Mantinea. The reference to Mantinea is in a way a subtle heralding of the unheralded sudden entrance shortly after Socrates’ speech of Alcibiades. Its close similarity to the noun “*mantis* (prophet),” on the other hand, is a useful instrument for Plato to insinuate the identity of Diotima as a prophetess.

and either of the two poets' accounts of love, this difference might not be susceptible in the last instance to a resolution by the power of ratiocination, or *dialektikos*, alone.

Diotima's teaching of Socrates in *ta erōtika* turns out to comprise a series of shocking revelations that stun Socrates' younger self. The elenchus that Socrates just now used to refute Agathon's belief that Eros is beautiful himself and a lover of the beautiful at the same time, Socrates confesses, was the first thing Diotima showed Socrates himself, whose opinion used to be no different from Agathon's (201e3-5). Diotima's clarification that Eros "is without a share (*amoiros*) in the good and beautiful things" (202d5) and desires those because he lacks them, however, rather confounds Socrates: for how can a "great god" be un-beautiful and un-good (202b6-7)? Diotima answers with a liberal laugh that Eros "is not a god at all," much less a great god (202b10-c2). Is he a mortal, then, Socrates has to ask; hardly, his teacher responds (202d8-9). Instead, Eros is a "great *daimōn*...between god and mortal" (202e13-14). Diotima's first lesson to Socrates is to get him out of the habit of thinking in terms of binary oppositions—either beautiful or ugly; either wise or ignorant; either mortal or immortal.⁷⁶ Eros is neither but in-between. Then, "what power" does this great *daimōn* have (202e2), Socrates asks (202d5). Diotima offers that "Interpreting and carrying messages over" between gods and humans is generally the daimonic power (202e3-5). Without the daimonic power, that of Eros being one, no human "arts or handicrafts" can rise above "mechanical (*banausos*)" banality (202a5-6). In Diotima's portrayal, Eros is an in-between being and simultaneously the very dynamics that transpires in the distance between gods and mortals.

⁷⁶ The same argument in favor of what is in-between is made by Socrates in the *Lysis*.

Diotima “speak[s] beautifully,” Socrates admires. Still, he wants to ascertain more specifically “what use to humans” the daimonic power of Eros could be (204c7-8). Before she answers, Diotima returns a question to Socrates. If love is of the beautiful things, what is this desire for, Diotima asks (204d5-6); so that they become one’s own, Socrates answers (204d7). Then, what is the desire of possessing the beautiful things for, Diotima presses further; Socrates hesitates to answer (204d). Diotima suggests that they replace the “beautiful” with the “good” to make the question easier to answer, and Socrates finds it indeed simple to answer the question now—so that one should be happy (204e6-7). Diotima sees no need for further questioning; for “the answer seems to have reached the end (*telos echein*)” (205a3). This “willing” for happiness love turns out to be, however, is it common to all humans? Socrates answers it is (205a5-8). Diotima seems to pull it all together to give a definition of love finally: the universal human desire for “the good to be one’s own forever” for happiness (206a11-12). Yet, she does not stop here. Rather she immediately turns to Socrates to ask him what is the “work (*ergon*)” of love as it manifests in the eager and zealous actions and practices of those in love: what is it that they actually do (206b1-3)? Socrates implores Diotima to teach him. Diotima does not seem to have expected he could have answered either. Without further ado she proceeds: “I will tell you...it is giving birth in beauty (*tokos en kalō*) both in body and in soul” (206b7-8). Socrates is dumbstruck: “divination (*manteias*) is needed...for I do not understand” (206b9-10).

If Diotima had stopped with the formulation that love is the desire for “the good to be one’s own forever” for the sake of happiness, we would have not moved far from that of Aristophanes’ account of love. A rather simple substitution of “the good” for “one’s own half” is all there is to warrant any claim of significant difference. Yet, it must be clear that the idea of eternal possession of the good by mortals is out of the question for Diotima, who has already

denied that possibility even for the great *daimōn* Eros, who is according to her “*amoiros*” in the good and beautiful (202d5). The eternal possession of the good, then, cannot but be something in the order of a figure of speech that refers to a phenomenon or practice that is quite otherwise than its literal signification. To get to that very phenomenon or practice, Diotima directs Socrates’ attention to what humans in love actually *do*. The unanticipated idiosyncratic explanation by Diotima, which flummoxes Socrates, is that they “give birth” in the presence of beauty. Diotima goes on: “all humans are pregnant both in body and in soul...and our nature desires to give birth. But no one can give birth in the ugly, but only in the beauty” (206c1-5). The gracious joy and cheer we experience in encountering a beautiful other is because it occasions the final birth-labor to bring out what we have been pregnant with (206d).

Only now, she reveals the true object of love: “Love is, Socrates, not of the beautiful as you suppose”; it is “of reproduction and birth in beauty” instead (206e2-5). Socrates is yet unsure about this sudden turn of the argument and responds, “Maybe (*Eien*)” (206e6). Diotima is unflinchingly certain nonetheless. Eternal possession of the good entails the desire not only for the good but also for immortality and what goes on forever for mortals is reproduction, which comes as close to immortality as is possible for mortals (206e7-8). Eternal possession of the good is literally impossible for mortals. Even a mortal, however, “partakes in (*metechei*)” the order of immortality by giving birth to and caring to leave behind the literal and metaphorical children in this world (208b2-3). Not through becoming a seamless one with the other, mimicking the divine serenity, but through the constant practice of generating, caring and sharing together “the children,” the lovers remain in a firm bond of friendship (209c4-7). Socrates’ question “what use for humans” the daimonic love could be is answered at last. The constant movement and action in the direction of the good and beautiful, even as it slips away

over and again, conserves for mortal human life its fragile contact with the order of immortality. The “cause” of love (207a6-7), Diotima asserts, is love of immortality, of which we have no share by nature, but in which we can partake not through the divine stasis but through the daimonic dynamics (207c1-208e1).

The Diotimic narrative of the erotic *pathēmata* in human life that consists in a sudden aesthetic fascination with the other, giving birth in his/her presence, and then sharing the offspring to tend to together, is evidently modeled after a heterosexual couple and their reproductive function. However, quite apart from that model, it also suggests a general theory of human development that is fundamentally owed to interactions with others. If the initial aesthetic fascination with the other is how we come to learn, despite ourselves, an aspect of the other that strikes us beautiful, the subsequent act of *genesis* is where we come to learn our own selves. The speeches, thoughts, artifacts, and practices that we give birth to in the presence of another being that kindles our creativity reveal who we are, or could have been despite ourselves, in a way impossible in the condition of absolute isolation. There is no claim of possessing the other in this narrative of love, nor a claim of penetrating knowledge of the identities of our own selves as well as of the others. It does not present love as a salvation from the complex particularities and dynamics of the world at large either—rather it has us more deeply invested in *its process*. All these aspects in erotic human relations defy the Aristophanic idyll of simple and always-already known self-identity that only awaits its matching *sumbolon* to merge into one with. It is with Diotima’s final teaching of the scheme of *ta erōtika*, however, that a narrative of human development through learning one’s own self and the world is more explicitly and broadly set out.

Diotima's *erōtika* that follows on the back of her exposition of love is an immanent exploration of what we can make of love, if love is indeed as she presents it. The scheme of her erotics is characterized by iterations of love—repeated experiences of aesthetic fascination with the other followed by giving-birth in his/her/its presence. Diotima, however, adds one extraneous element to her *erōtika* to make, or sublimate, if you like, love into the *art* of love that goes beyond what love is as it happens to us—she adds a moment of conscious reflection. Each incidence of falling in love provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the *eidos* of beauty itself (210b2), so that we could progressively broaden its conceptual reach in embrace of greater numbers and kinds of beautiful beings and things. First, one loves “one body” who strikes her as beautiful and gives birth to “beautiful speeches” (210a7-8). Yet, she must also “realize (*katanoēsai*)” that this particular individual is just one instance of the general species of beautiful bodies—a “brother” to any other beautiful bodies (210a8-b1). While this realization does not render the beloved suddenly un-beautiful, it does disenchant the lover from her initial obsession with the beloved individual. Such obsession is “small (*smikron*)”; she would rather be a “lover of all beautiful bodies” (210b4-6). This reflection-driven love of all beautiful bodies, however, cannot be the same as the intense passion of the first falling for one particular body. No giving-birth follows. But it readies her for another round of intense love, struck by a different, “more honorable” species of beauty—beauty of the soul (210b7). The individual of a beautiful body might strike her anew now with his/her beautiful soul. Or someone whom she has not in the least considered beautiful might suddenly strike her with his/her beauty in the soul. More speeches are begotten. Again, reflection will “compel” her to appreciate the species of beauty in the soul as it manifests in various human “practices and customs,” which turn out to be “akin (*sun-genes*)” to one another (210c3-5). As a consequence of this reflection, she will consider the

beauty of the body in general “small” (210c5-6). From this moment on, her vista of beauty opens up to wider generalities of “knowledges (*epistēmas*)” not reducible to this or that particular person or practice—a vista indeed of “the great sea of beauty” (210c6-d4). Gazing upon it, she gives birth to “many beautiful speeches and thoughts in unstinting philosophy” (210d4-6). She inhabits the same world through this process “as if ascending on a ladder” (211c3); greatly changed is her appreciation of it, however, as various shades and degrees of beauty in it have been revealed to her by the leadership of *erōs* (210a) *and* by her own reflection on love’s initiation of her into new species of beauty.

The “end of erotics” is not yet reached (210e4): “all the preceding labors” (21036) are so that she should “suddenly catch sight of something amazingly beautiful by nature” (210e5-6): “the beautiful *idea* itself, pure, clean, unmixed, and not infected with the human flesh and colors and other many mortal nonsenses” (211e1-3). Then, and only then, beholding this *idea* itself of beauty, we give birth to “true [virtue]”—rather than to beautiful speeches and thoughts, or “images of virtue” (212a4-5). Diotima believes “even you,” Socrates, “could be initiated into the erotics”; she is not confident, though, that he could make it through to the end (209e5-210a2). Evidently won over by her teaching, nonetheless, Socrates propagates to others and trains himself in this peculiar erotics, which lures him with the possibility of ultimate achievement in human excellence, or *arête*.

Socratic erotics for those who are no Socrates

The *Symposium* includes many allusions—not the least Alcibiades’s enamored testimony to the unique excellence of Socrates’ character as he witnessed it in person both in bed and in

battle—to the possibility that Socrates, despite his alleged teacher’s lack of confidence in him, has indeed made it to the end of the erotics, making himself a man who gives birth to “true virtue.”⁷⁷ Granted that he did, the *Symposium* does not show him as a deeply estranged man who is fundamentally discomfited in the mundane plurality of the city, as if forcefully confined in a dark cave after having seen the true light of sun. Rather, he is deeply interested in the brilliantly promising young man of his city (that is, Alcibiades); he enjoys conversing as much as he enjoys drinking (his capacity for both is unmatched by any); he is brave in the battlefield; and he speaks in a way that moves the mind of anyone—“man, woman, or lad”—even as he speaks in ostensibly coarse language (215d3, 221e). True virtue, as it manifests in the mortal life of humans, the *Symposium*’s presentation of Socrates reminds us, is always-already conditioned by the particular context of a situation even the most highly achieved philosopher cannot abstract himself from. The end of erotics does not lift the philosopher from sundry particularities of the city, but makes him peculiarly at ease with them. It might be because Socrates can appreciate more beauty in the city than anyone else in it with his ascent in erotics that he is so at ease in it, at least as the *Symposium* presents him.

While we are no Socrates as the *Symposium* presents him—and also as the *Symposium*, with Alcibiades’s repeated description of Socrates as an absolutely unique and bizarre (*atopos*) individual (221c2-d6), would emphatically remind us—, we can still learn from this archetypal erotician’s speech in the *Symposium* an ethos of life that appreciates the long and complex process of learning/seeing the beauty that resides in the world, other persons and our own selves.⁷⁸ The realization that our understanding of beauty and our perceptions of our own

⁷⁷ Alcibiades describes Socrates as courageous, temperate, wise and just.

⁷⁸ This ethical learning I propose, has nothing to do with the claim that what we find in Socrates’ speech is necessarily Plato’s final words on love, nor with the claim that Socrates as Alcibiades’ speech portrays him matches

identities as well as of others change over time through what Socrates presents as the experience of love tames our tendency for intolerant moral conceit, on one hand, and promotes respectful curiosity, on the other, toward the mysteries of others—not because we can exhaust them, but because we probably never could. Both the disciplining of the tendency for moral conceit and the promotion of respectful curiosity toward others are the qualities of mind that will find most use and respect in the city of generalized liberty with robust public space.

the historical Socrates. I am not making, and not interested in making, any of these two claims about Plato's intention and Socrates' identity.

CHAPTER 3

A Socratic Human Image: The Ambivalence of *Erōs* in the *Republic*

Socrates in the *Phaedrus* claims that he hardly has “leisure” to pursue “colorful wisdom” in sundry matters “like the wise (*hoi sophoi*)” (229c6, e3). He is “still unable to know, according to the Delphic inscription, myself; ridiculous indeed it seems to me to examine other things while not comprehending it” (229e5-230a1). The elusive question of his own nature preoccupies him: “Am I (*tugchanō*) a beast more twisted and savage than Typhon, or a serener and simpler animal partaking by nature in the lot (*moiras phusei metechon*) of the divine and gentle” (230a1-6)? This curious remark of Socrates happens to preface three long speeches on *erōs* that follow in the *Phaedrus*. It is as if Socrates obliquely justifies his keen interest in the subject of *erōs* (227c)—intimating that the stake of the question of *erōs* is no less than our self-knowledge about who we are and what we could be by nature. He might as well have said that the examination of our own nature calls for an account of *erōs*.

Tracing the episodic but decisive appearance of *erōs* in the *Republic* in its portrayal of both the best and the basest human possibilities—a philosopher and a tyrant—, I will propose in

this last chapter a reading of the *Republic* as Plato's study of human nature that is characterized by ambivalent indeterminacy. The answer of the *Republic* to Socrates' own question in the *Phaedrus*—"Am I a beast more twisted and savage than Typhon, or a serener and simpler animal partaking by nature in the lot of the divine and gentle?"—is that we are both, or more precisely that we could be either, for the supreme motive force of our soul, *erōs*, is precariously indeterminate in its direction of the soul. Socrates in the *Republic* proposes to "create from the beginning a city in speech" (369c9) as an analogue of a human soul that is expediently large in size for us to look into (368c-e). The possibility of this city's coming into being, however, is entirely dependent, according to Socrates, on having the philosophers rule the city (471c473e), who are described as a peculiar breed of erotic men and women whose intense *erōs* is directed toward the *idea* (490b). Yet, once Socrates, by means of this city-soul analogy, comes to reveal the philosophic *erōs* as the supreme initiative force of the soul, which is distinct from and irreducible to any elements in the tri-partite scheme—materialistic desire, tenacious spirit, and calculating reason—, he also reveals that the philosophic nature is the most perilously corruptible element in the city (490e-492a). The paramount political challenge facing "our work as founders" of a just city comes down to "in what way a city practicing philosophy (*metacheirizomenē polis philosophian*) will not be destroyed" given the innate susceptibility of the philosophic nature in humans to corruption (519c8, 497d8-9). Even before *erōs* enters the speech again now in the guise of a tyrant in Book 9, the most wretched human possibility is foreshadowed in the section where the most elevated human potentiality is envisioned. And the underlying common thread of the two extremes in the *Republic* is *erōs*.

When we read the *Republic* from the standpoint of the problematic of *erōs* as it relates to Socrates' exploration of human nature, the politico-philosophical argument of the *Republic* turns

out to be much more ambiguous and its intellectual value as a politico-philosophical enterprise much richer for that very ambiguity than the strong tradition of analytical literature on the *Republic* allows.⁷⁹ I suggest that the *Republic* is a politically valuable work, because it reminds us that it is within the natural range of possibilities that we could be extremely just and extremely unjust and compels us carefully to consider the necessary tasks and complex challenges in building and preserving a good political order given what I would like to call the bounded indeterminacy of erotic human nature.

A city for a soul

The peculiarity and mystery of the *Republic* in its ostensible exploration of the question of justice owes much to Socrates' proposal to "create a city in speech from the beginning" in order to discern in it the "idea" of justice and injustice writ large (369c; 369a). The project of founding a city and legislating for its constitution might not have struck contemporary Athenians as far-fetched, when the practice of settling a colony (*apoikia*) was not far outside the range of normal politics. The cool suggestion to stand a city in for a person as an enlarged image of the latter with an analogous structural order, however, is an altogether separate matter. There is little

⁷⁹ For examples of this analytical tradition, which frames the argument of the *Republic* in terms of a tri-partite structure comprising rational, spirited, and desiring faculties, see Cornford (1952, 1971) and Reeve (1988). Both Cornford (1971, 120) and Reeve (1988, 168), however, also argue that the faculty of reason (*to logistikon*) in the *Republic* is not wholly reducible to a ratiocinative function but comes close to a variety of conative desire. While I agree with them that the relation between reason and desire in the *Republic* is complicated, I do not believe that the problem of this complex relation can be best captured and resolved by rendering "*to logistikon*" as a variety of desire, stretching its meaning out of its very clear usage in the text of the *Republic*. I opt, in contrast, to illustrate the role of *erōs* in the *Republic*, which brings the interplay between reason and desire to our attention without ever collapsing the conceptual boundary between reasoning and desiring.

that is ordinary by custom, or solid by theory in this suggestion of analogy.⁸⁰ What lends the proposed analogy plausibility just enough to allow it is that we do attribute justice to a city as well as to a person, and that a city is surely “bigger” than a person (368d-e). No theoretical necessity follows from either, however, to believe in a structural correspondence between the constitution of a city and a person. Socrates himself is aware that the analogy is a loose supposition (368d; 434d-e); nevertheless, he wants to carry on with it.

Below, I will begin with a close review of what Socrates likens to “a preamble” (357a2), Book 1 of the *Republic*, and the immediately preceding section in Book 2 to Socrates’ idiosyncratic proposal to build a city as a bigger substitute for a soul, where the question of justice is set out before the methodology of city-soul analogy is proposed. Then, in the second half, I will proceed to trace the *Republic*’s narrative of literary representation (or representation “*en logō*”) of a city-soul: the tri-partite scheme of city-soul up to Book 4 serves as a “rough sketch” that Socrates needs to bring to “complete elaboration” (501a-b, 504d) with the addition of *erōs* in Books 5 and 6. The completed image of the erotic human charms Glaucon for its beauty (540c, 543d), but it also foreshadows the appearance of the tyrant of Book 9.

Glaucon’s polished statues

Socrates’ admiration of another speaker is often as suspect as his notorious self-deprecation. Lavish compliments by Socrates often herald an extensive critique to come in Plato’s dialogues: it is as if with an attention-stirring effusive compliment Socrates

⁸⁰ G. R. F. Ferrari (2005, 41-2; 59-65) notes it is a strange idea that Plato takes pains to introduce as such through the cautious words of Socrates and whose parallel is not readily found in Plato’s contemporary literature, nor within the Platonic corpus.

acknowledges a worthy problematic, which the praised person broached without an appropriate grasp of its complexity, depth, and urgency. In the *Republic*, we encounter one of those moments of suspect admiration in Book 2, just before Socrates proposes to “create a city in speech from the beginning” (369c). “*Babai*,” Socrates exclaims in an apparent astonishment: “o dear Glaucon, how vigorously as if statues-of-men submit to judgment (*krisin*) you cleanse out (*ekkathaireis*) each of these men” (361d4-6). The exclamation “*babai*” claims our attention first; then the parallel and contrast between “statues-of-men (*andrianta*)” and “men (*androin*)” halt us with second thoughts about this apparent praise of Glaucon’s accomplishment.

Glaucon has just finished his devil’s advocate speech in praise of injustice and in “reviv[al]” of Thrasymachus’ speech (358b-c). He had described the greatest injustice and justice as they manifest respectively in the lives of men of complete injustice and of complete justice. The life of the former, “having no vexation at doing injustice,” is “much better” than that of the latter (362b; 358c). As he contrasts these men of opposite moral character, however, Glaucon might have effected to “cleanse out” (*ek-katharein*) something essentially human from them. For all the polish, or because of all that polish, the men in his speech are reduced to “statues-of-men”—with gritty humanity scoured away. It is dubious whether we are warranted to make such a grave *krisis*, judgment or choice, about the guiding principle of our existence between justice and injustice, or “about the greatest matter, the good and bad life” as Socrates puts it (580a-b), on the basis of these cleansed-out statues-of-men.

When Glaucon demands that Socrates convince him otherwise about the “power” of justice in Thrasymachus’ speech (358b), therefore, Glaucon inadvertently re-configures the question of justice (so far dominated by the concept of *technē* in Book 1), bringing together the question of *what justice is* with that of *who we are*. Or else, that is what Socrates is set to make

of Glaucon's speech with his peculiar comment on Glaucon's vigorously scoured men-statues. Among all that Glaucon had to say about justice and injustice, Socrates hones in on what kind of human image his speech has sculpted. Socrates alerts his audience that we cannot appropriately understand what justice is as "a human virtue" (335c), without also understanding what we are and what we are capable of becoming as human beings. Glaucon deserves praise for enabling Socrates to tackle the former question as a corollary of the latter; but he also deserves a subtly ironic praise for so enabling Socrates on account of the faults of his speech—the glib superficiality in its portrayal of human life.

Speaking of justice

The drama of the *Republic* begins when Polemarchus⁸¹ catches sight of Socrates, who came down with Plato's brother Glaucon to Piraeus, the Athenian port city and center of the democratic faction. Polemarchus, along with Plato's brother Adeimantus among his company of several others, insists Socrates stay with them. At Polemarchus's house, where still several others, including the unforgettable Thrasymachus, are gathered, Polemarchus's father Kephalus warmly welcomes Socrates. The philosopher responds with a courteous request to learn from the patriarch of the house "what kind of road" old age is (328e). Prompted by Socrates' questions, Kephalus offers straightforward reflections on his life, wealth, and character, from which Socrates incidentally picks up a problem that opens it up to an extended discussion of the night:

⁸¹ Polemarchus, son of Kephalus and brother of Lysias, is a wealthy metic put to death by the Thirty during the oligarchic coup of 404 BC in Athens in the aftermath of the Peloponnesian War.

“of this very thing, justice,” Socrates wants to speak further (331c)—the “definition (*horos*) of justice” eludes them (331d).

The incidental subject, justice, however, might have been hovering in the air from the beginning when Polemarchus takes hold of Socrates. The two men, who in hindsight shared the fate of drinking hemlock, respectively picked out as the enemy of the brief oligarchic and of the restored democratic regime in Athens in the aftermath of the Peloponnesian War, are brought back by Plato to the time of their friendly relationship in private life. There is a certain poignancy in this arrangement.⁸² If the question of justice is not completely dissociable from the legal authority of the city, and human existence is always a political one, the fate of Socrates and Polemarchus, a still recent memory for Plato’s contemporaries, calls into question whether justice is reducible to compliance with the judgment and action of the city.⁸³ It is noteworthy that Polemarchus pledges to “share the battle together” (*koinōnein tēs machēs*: 335d) with Socrates,⁸⁴ only when Socrates refutes his conviction that justice is to benefit friends and harm enemies—essentially a factional logic of enmity and competition. If justice is not reducible to the whim of the winning faction of the city’s competing parties, it is imperative to disentangle the definition of justice from this agonist logic of faction, in which the only reference for justice is where one belongs.

The inadequacy of Polemarchus’ definition of justice for its inherently relativist and positivist tendency, however, waits for Thrasymachus’ intervention to be displayed in an

⁸² See also Ferrari’s discussion of this evoking of the tragic political background (2005, 11).

⁸³ Plato himself gives this question an extended treatment in the *Crito*, having Socrates explain to the friends visiting him in the jail while he awaits execution the basis and the value of compliance with the city’s laws and judicial decisions.

⁸⁴ It is an ironic turn of phrase given the context. Perhaps Polemarchus cannot get himself out of the habit of using militant language.

expressly political context. When Socrates with his characteristic elenchus corrects Polemarchus that it is “not the work of a just man to harm, either friend or not, but...of an unjust man,” and Polemarchus vows to ally with Socrates to defend together the position that “in no way it is just to harm anyone” (335d, e), Thrasymachus jumps into the discussion. He hardly seems able to contain his disdain that verges on indignation toward Socrates (336b-d). Thrasymachus proffers his own theory that justice is “the advantage of the stronger” (338c). Socrates presses him to explain what he means by “the stronger”; Thrasymachus expresses his disgust at Socrates’ naivety but proceeds to explain as requested (338c-d). In every city, the rulers who set the laws to benefit themselves at the expense of the others are the stronger (338d-e). For those who are compelled to obey those laws on account of their relative weakness in power and are “just” in the sense of legal compliance, therefore, justice is “the advantage of the other” (343c). It is bluntly declared through Thrasymachus’ tactless speech that such an egotistic practice of the stronger, essentially no different from “benefitting friends and harming enemies,” is downright injustice when seen from the perspective of “the other.” When you act as if everyone is an enemy, you reach “the most extreme injustice,” and as Thrasymachus puts it, “this is tyranny” (344a).⁸⁵ To the tyrant everyone is an enemy.

Thrasymachus is disgusted that Socrates pretends not to understand this plain reality of power relations in the polis that affects one radically differently than others according to where one stands and belongs. Socrates’ persuasion of Polemarchus that it is the work of injustice to do harm should be no news to those who suffer the harsh reality of it every day because they are no friends of the stronger but “the other”; on the other hand, the benign moralizing that justice does

⁸⁵ In Glaucon’s following speech “doing good to friends and harming enemies” appears again as what an unjust man does, or is competent to do (362c).

not harm anyone would provoke contemptuous indignation from those who indeed harm no one but themselves in their legal compliance (cf. 343c). Relative to where one stands in the relations of power in the city, Polemarchus' justice can be insufferable injustice. One only affords to forget or ignore this brutal relativity with a conceit of one's own power. Socrates alludes as much at the end of his conversation with Polemarchus: the claim that justice is to benefit friends and harm enemies belongs to "some rich man who has a high opinion of what he can do" (336a).⁸⁶ Socrates is spared, however, the indecency of carrying this exposure of the complacency of his good-willed host's opinion of justice to an unsavory extent. Thrasymachus performs that work for Socrates; and in the meanwhile Socrates consistently hails the sophist as "the best man," "the blessed man," "the daimonic man," and such (eg. 337e; 341b; 344d).⁸⁷ Socrates does so with obvious irony, of course; but irony works only when there is a grain of truth, to be inflated to such an extent as to become a jarring untruth.

The "great flood of words" that the "daimonic man" Thrasymachus "poured down into our ears like a bath attendant" (344d) in fact serves the group gathered at Polemarchus's house as they face the question of justice. Thrasymachus' unabashed portrayal of the *agōn* for power in the *polis* washes down any mystic shroud of abstract moralist pretense about justice, behind which one would hide oneself while enjoying the sweet comforts of power, or else while harboring a bitter opportunistic greed for power that one sorely lacks. Such insincerity and half-commitment become very uncomfortable for anyone of gentlemanly pretense or aspiration after Thrasymachus' speech that exposes what would have passed for justice as injustice.

⁸⁶ Socrates later in Book 9 presents such wealthy men as small tyrants (578d).

⁸⁷ Socrates later also says, "Don't slander Thrasymachus and me just as we've become friends—not that we were enemies before" (498c-d).

Thrasymachus' uninhibited manner, if savage, provokes authenticity in others.⁸⁸ He calls upon the others either to unabashedly own, as he did, injustice as "good counsel" (*euboulian*) and justice as "whopping naivety (*panu gennaian euētheian*)," if not downright impotence (348c-d; cf. 344c), or to boldly demonstrate that justice transcends the logic and vicissitudes of power contests in the polis.⁸⁹ On those who openly assume the latter stance against Thrasymachus falls now the burden of offering an alternate theory of justice. The stake of the "battle," in which Polemarchus pledged alliance to Socrates, has now emerged in shaper relief. Disinvesting the moral sensibility of justice from attachment to one's partisan identity and pursuit of power demands an alternative foundation of justice in the human condition to the political *agōn*, in reference to which both Polemarchus and Thrasymachus, albeit in different sentiments, have defined justice.

No syllogistic elenchus will meet the demands of such a task. Socrates wins the sophist's unenthusiastic concession that "according to your argument," justice brings a happy and blessed life to the one who is just (353e). Socrates is the first to admit, however, that "out of this discussion, nothing at all has come to be known to me" about justice (354b-c). That he could perform a skillful eristic against Thrasymachus's definition of justice does not mean that he knows what justice is, or even whether it is a virtue at all (354b).

The request of the brothers: justice without reputation

⁸⁸ Thrasymachus is a unique character in the *Republic* who can be characterized by authenticity, if a savage one. He profusely exhibits uncensored passions of pride, indignation, and last but not least, shame, and makes earnest, if vulgar, speeches.

⁸⁹ Thrasymachus has at least one person who is expressly sympathetic to his argument, Cleitophon (340a-b).

The humble admission of absolute *aporia* by Socrates at the end of Book 1 does not discourage Glaucon, who is “the most courageous about everything” (357a).⁹⁰ Glaucon is determined to bring back Thrasymachus’ speech, by which he is not persuaded, but against which he has yet to hear a satisfactory counter argument in praise of justice. He insists Socrates offer one to the present company now (358d). Not only that, Glaucon has in mind a clear idea of how he would like Socrates to praise justice: “I desire to hear what [justice] is and what power it has itself by itself when it is in the soul, dismissing the wages and the outcomes (*ta gignomena*) of it” (358b). Socrates has just categorized justice as the finest kind of good, prized “both for its own sake and for the outcomes of it” (358a)—in contradistinction to the other kinds, either prized simply for their inherent “enjoyment” (*to chairein*), or only for “the outcomes” that issue from what is in itself joyless toil (357c; 358a).⁹¹ Glaucon challenges Socrates: justice “appears to the many” to belong to “the toilsome kind, which, in itself to be avoided as being difficult (*chalepon*), has to be practiced for the sake of the wages and good reputation won through the opinion of the others (*eudokimēseōn dia doxan*).” Socrates answers, “I know that it appears so and a while ago justice taken as such was faulted by Thrasymachus” (358a). Hence, Glaucon asks Socrates to dismiss “the wages and outcomes” of justice, which he equates with reputation: Socrates should expound justice “itself by itself when it is in the soul,” for it is this internal and subjective aspect of justice that is the point of dispute between Socrates and “the many.”

Glaucon proceeds to restore Thrasymachus’ argument, articulating its core elements that injustice manifests power; brings one a better life; and thus is a naturally desirable way of life for

⁹⁰ Glaucon’s courage might partly stem from his inability to fathom the full extent and gravity of the very challenge he is bringing forth. See also, Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*, III-3 for Socrates’ confrontation of the young Glaucon’s over-zealous political ambition. On the other hand, courage (manliness) is presented as an ambivalent virtue in the *Republic* that needs to be tamed.

⁹¹ The distinction among these three kinds of good is Glaucon’s suggestion, however, not Socrates’ own.

anyone; justice is simply the opposite (358c). Glaucon's speech turns out to be more than a rehashed repetition of Thrasymachus' argument, however. Quite apart from Thrasymachus' argument, Glaucon's request that Socrates extol justice "itself by itself" putting aside its "outcomes" introduces a new emphasis in Glaucon's speech on appearance and perception in interpersonal interaction. With good repute identified as the primary beneficial "outcome" of justice, the perception and opinion held of one by others figures centrally in Glaucon's illustration of injustice and justice as he tries to see to it that Socrates appreciates the necessity and legitimacy of his request to abstract from *doxa*.

Glaucon's choice of the mythology of the magic ring of the Lydian tyrant Gyges to make his point about injustice is suggestive in this regard. The ring Gyges accidentally acquires from a larger-than-life-sized naked human corpse gives him the power of invisibility: he can manipulate his appearance and disappearance in the view of the others with as easy a maneuver as twisting the collet of the ring inside or outside. Liberated from the watching eyes of the others, Gyges commits murder and adultery with license and impunity and ultimately usurps the throne of power (359c-360b). Such an aggressively acquisitive impulse will starkly reveal itself as part of universal human nature, Glaucon suggests, "if there were two such rings," worn by an unjust and a just person each. Released from the fear of others, both will indulge license the same way as Gyges, acting as if "an equal to a god among humans" (360b-c). The symbolic utility for Glaucon of Gyges's ring of invisibility does not simply consist in illustrating the view of human nature undergirding Thrasymachus's argument, however. The power of Gyges's ring symbolizes human power itself in Glaucon's speech. A life-sized equivalent to the mythologized ring of invisibility is one's ability to manipulate "like clever craftsmen" how one is seen by the others (360e). In what follows in Glaucon's speech, "the most perfect injustice" is portrayed as

“doing the greatest injustices while procuring to oneself the greatest reputation (*doxan*) for justice” (361a). This dissimulation is imagined by Glaucon as an art of invisibility and disappearance—to commit injustices hidden from the perception of the others. The unjust person resourcefully dissembles himself as a just one, having many friends, much wealth, skillful rhetoric, and unflinching resort to force when necessary to cover over his unjust deeds; and he is rewarded for his crafty ability with the “wages” of “reputation for justice” (357c; 361a-b).

A man of justice is easy enough for Glaucon to put “in speech” now, for he is simply to be made “contrarily affected to the first,” the unjust one: “doing no injustices at all, let him have the greatest reputation for injustice” (361b-c). This arrangement will also have an advantage of having him “tested” in his devotion to justice unalloyed by “honors and gifts” (361c). Glaucon drives it home repeating once again: “let him stay unchanged till death, appearing unjust throughout life while being just” (361c-d). Now that both the injustice of the unjust and the justice of the just person have reached their respective extreme, Glaucon proposes, they can be submitted to judgment of which of the two is “happier” (361d).

At this point Socrates interjects with an apparently irrepressible exclamation, which we saw above: “*Babai*, o dear Glaucon, how vigorously as if statues-of-men submit for judgment you cleanse out each of these men” (361d). Glaucon takes it at its face value: “As best as I can,” he responds, and proceeds to finish off with the “not at all difficult” description “in speech” of the respective lives of the two (361d): the one enjoying all the worldly goods of life including political power and gods’ favor (362b-c), and the other suffering all ills of life in the form of violent persecution until rent to death, finally coming to too late a realization that “not to be, but to seem just ought one to wish” (362a). The better life is obviously the unjust one’s, Glaucon concludes: “so they say, o Socrates” (362c).

At the end of Glaucon's speech, Socrates would have interjected again—"I had in mind to say something to it"—had Adeimantus not chimed in to second "what seems to me Glaucon wants" (362d). Adeimantus offers his own speech to persuade Socrates of the need to "take away the reputations, as Glaucon told you to," namely, "take away the true reputation from each and attach the false one" (367b). Adeimantus, like Glaucon, makes this request to hear justice praised for its "profit" in itself to the one who possesses it, apart from the "wages and reputations" conferred by others (367d). Socrates is now "much delighted" (368a), apparently because he appreciates the sincere wish of Glaucon and Adeimantus. Without much ado, other than profuse praise of the "nature (*phusis*)" of the two brothers⁹² and a rather typical disclaimer on his own incompetence, Socrates concedes to undertake the "investigation" of justice—a "not slight" task, for which he suggests a not ordinary method (368c-d): "let's make a city in speech from the beginning" (369c).

A city for a man without a city

Socrates thus launches his investigation of justice with the suggestion to build and look into the constitution of a city in order to gain an easier vision of justice in it (368d-369c). He makes no particular commentary on the combined request of Glaucon and Adeimantus. If we anticipate the end of the *Republic* in Book 10, however, Socrates unambiguously declares that it is "not possible" for justice and injustice "to escape the notice of both gods and humans." When Socrates thus belatedly corrects the brothers' imagined men with life-long false reputations, he does it in a singular way to implicated himself and his entire speech into this correction: "give

⁹² Socrates praises the brothers ironically quoting a poem that glorifies the "renown" attached to the family.

back to me what you borrowed in the speech...I gave you the just one's appearing to be unjust and the unjust one just, even though it were not possible...[for] all the same it had to be given for the sake of the speech so that justice itself against injustice itself could be judged" (612c). It is only with this statement that we come to a retrospective confirmation that when Socrates launched his investigation of justice in Book 2, he indeed accepted in silence Glaucon's unlikely model of men of radically misrecognized character—for whom "being" and "appearing" are completely severed dimensions of existence (361c-d). For men so situated, living in society and interacting with one another should mean nothing else but dissimulation and misrecognition. Socrates does not believe that men are so situated. Nonetheless, he has apparently accepted, "for the sake of the speech," the request of Glaucon and Adeimantus to praise "justice itself by itself when it is in the soul" exactly as they meant it: to explore justice as a purely subjective interior experience of men, who are radically shut out from the possibilities of inter-subjective communication of that experience.

Reflecting on the speeches of Glaucon and Adeimantus in Book 2 from the perspective of the above remark of Socrates in Book 10, we learn much about the nature of Socrates' *logos* on justice in the *Republic*—its pursuit of delimited purpose on the back of a self-consciously "not possible" assumption about the human condition. The request of Glaucon and Adeimantus Socrates turns out to have accepted in silence in Book 2 circumscribes Socrates' *logos* with a clearly and narrowly defined object of investigation: justice as a subjective psychic experience of an individual. On the other hand, it both forces and enables Socrates, "for the sake of" this challenging exploration of the human psyche, to imagine this individual in a situation where external expression and communication of this internal dimension of justice is scarcely relevant, which practically amounts to abstracting him from the ordinary human condition of existence in

a *polis*. Socrates “enters” the human soul, as it were, with the inter-subjective dimension of the psychic economy largely discounted. This is what we could call Plato’s discursive construction of an abstract individual, as if a man without a city, whose isolated psychic world Socrates explores and elaborates to articulate a theory of justice in the *Republic* by building a city as its enlarged image. This particular abstraction is worthwhile to remember as we trace *erōs* in the narrative of the *Republic*, in which love as an interpersonal attraction is never admitted either in its just city or just soul.

Watching a city coming into being

Socrates offers that “if we should watch a city coming into being in speech,” we could “see not only its justice coming into being but its injustice” (369a). The definition of justice in the *Republic*, however, is discovered, as it were, prematurely—well before the city that Socrates has in mind, has come into being in its full elaboration.⁹³ Not only is the definition of justice found in early Book 4—“practicing one’s own things and not busy-bodily (*to ta auta prattein kai mē polupragmonein*)”—scarcely original as Socrates notes himself (433a-b) but it is the very principle set down “from the beginning...when we were founding the city” (433a). If we should take this definition of justice found in a supposedly “correctly founded” city for “a certain image” of a man of justice (427e; 443c), nevertheless, “I don’t suppose we’ll seem to speak utter falsehood,” Socrates offers (444a). The first and foremost of “what are truly of oneself (*alēthōs*

⁹³ Leo Strauss (1964, 105-6) observes that the “premature investigation of what justice is” in Book 4 is a testimony to the *Republic*’s “political” character: “Justice, we may say...is the virtue most obviously related to the city. The theme of the Republic is political in more than one sense, and the political questions of great urgency do not permit delay; the question of justice must be answered by all means even if all the evidence needed for an adequate answer is not yet in.”

ta heautou)” is one’s soul (443c-d). Practicing one’s own things first of all means taking care of one’s soul. This is the first step. Then one ought not to care for one’s soul in any random way, but in the way comparable to the harmonious unity and rigid hierarchy set up and maintained among the three classes of the imagined city—providers (or money-makers), soldiers (or auxiliaries), and rulers (or true guardians), whose psychical analogues are found respectively in the desiring, spirited, and calculating functions of the soul. Justice is keeping one’s soul so ordered that the calculating part rules over and controls, with the aid of the spirited part, the desiring part of one’s psychic economy, each part in this way practicing its own work without meddling with that of the others (443c-d).⁹⁴ Or else, we could say that is justice, without incurring the blame that we “speak utter falsehood” (444a).

If we take at face value Socrates’ proposal to substitute a “bigger” city for a “smaller” man as if the former were an optical magnification of the latter, the city falling short of its full elaboration is also the individual psyche falling short of its full elaboration (543c-544a). Before the first articulation of justice is made in Book 4, Socrates indeed announces a completion of the city, but in a peculiarly qualified way: “Certainly then founded now would be to you, o Son of Ariston, the city” (427c-d). Glaucon, Son of Ariston and Socrates’ speech partner at this point, does not see why it would not be. If others thought otherwise, they do not get a chance to voice their reservation as yet, for Glaucon immediately responds with his characteristic eagerness to Socrates’ proposal that Glaucon “look into the city...yourself calling in your brother and Polemarchus and the others” to see if they can find justice in it “whether it escapes the notice of all gods and humans or not” (427d). Glaucon protests that “you promised” to make such an

⁹⁴ In this definition, the proper function of reason (*to logistikon*), paradoxically, is meddling with the others, with which the other two should not meddle with.

examination (427d-e). Socrates compromises: “while I must do so, it behooves you to help” (427e). Socrates then proceeds in partnership with Glaucon to identify justice and injustice in the city, on the supposition that “our city, if indeed correctly founded” should be “perfectly good,” meaning that the city should be equipped with the perfect set of cardinal virtues—wisdom, courage, moderation and justice (427e). Socrates strategizes to zero in on the identity of justice, tackling first the location of the other three virtues in the city, which he explains in terms of the specialized functions in class division (in the cases of wisdom and courage) and their relation amongst one another (in that of moderation). When only justice remains to be uncovered, Socrates, along with Glaucon, makes a dramatic, almost slapstick, pretense of “hunters surrounding a thicket” (432 b-c), whose “ridiculous” earnestness, just as with any comedic duo, would derive from their “stupid[ity]” (432d-e). Socrates, in the fashion of comedic fuss, calls Glaucon’s attention to the quarry that “has been rolling around at our feet from the beginning”: “*Iou, iou*, o Glaucon” (432d). The sudden and unusual farce-like tone adopted by Socrates that inevitably imparts a sense of levity to the discovery of justice anticipates Socrates’ reserved conclusion toward the end of Book 4 that the justice discussed so far is only good enough not to make them “seem to speak utter falsehood.”⁹⁵

A comparable sentiment to Socrates’ half-commitment to the city and its justice that Glaucon is happy with is exhibited when Socrates takes to “applying to the individual” the justice of the city, to see if the justice of the two “agrees” (434d-e). Socrates notes “a *slight* question again about the soul,” a question of such a magnitude that an irony might be the most appropriate way to put it in words: “if it has these three forms in it or not” analogous to the three

⁹⁵ Could it be Plato’s friendly parody of Aristophanes, a conservative critic of Athenian democracy who likes to make fun in his comedies of the very character or spirit of democratic Athens that Plato has Socrates target as a social evil in this part of the *Republic*—the “busy-bodding,” *polupragmosunē*?

classes of the city (435c; emphasis translating “*phaulon ge*”). Glaucon also recognizes the challenge: “Why, perhaps, o Socrates, the saying is true that fine things are difficult (*chalepa ta kala*)” (435c). This is the first time that Glaucon admits, or perceives an inkling of, the possibility of ambivalence of human things. When we recall his categorization of “good” offered in Book 2, Glaucon seems to have subscribed to a sharp dichotomy between enjoyment and toil, this bad and that good (357b-c). That the beautiful (*kalos*) things of life could also be difficult *to do* (*chalepos*), his tri-category conception of the good hardly admits.⁹⁶ His eagerness to proceed with the present discussion until the justice of a person unveils itself, however, is greater than his inchoate taste for subtlety and complexity. When Socrates is skeptical of the worth of “such a method as we are now using in this speech” for dealing with such a “*slight question*” as the nature of the soul, Glaucon assures Socrates: “Shouldn’t we be content? To me it would be enough at present at any rate.” Socrates concedes: “Well then, to me as well it will be quite enough” (435d). On the ground of this reserved agreement, Socrates suggests that “then it is very much a matter of necessity for us to agree” that the soul has three parts analogous to those of the city that has just been founded (435e).

Socrates proceeds to substantiate this proposition in a less than worthy way for the question (436b), pointing out that we often experience simultaneous “willing” toward and “drawing back (*anthelein*)” from objects, which indicates there are at least two different parts in the soul (436b-439c). Socrates identifies the former as the evidence of the “desiring (*epithumētikon*)” and the latter as the “calculating (*logistikon*)” part of the soul (439d). Another psychological experience known to us is the passion of anger aroused at our own action when the

⁹⁶ Similarly Glaucon’s deference to “*to legomenon* (the saying),” a customary opinion held by many, is something new in the unfolding of the *Republic* so far. See also Ferrari (2005, 15-20) for a discussion of the “element of *hauteur*” in Glaucon.

recalcitrant desires fail to obey the dictate of reason, which betrays yet another part of the soul, which is the “spirited (*thumoeides*)” (439e-441b). Socrates, along with Glaucon, concludes that justice of the soul could be analogous to that of the city—a state of unilateral but harmonious hierarchy among its three discrete components each playing a distinct function.

The female drama

The discussion up to Book 4 brings itself to what looks like a conclusion about the “power” of justice that satisfies Glaucon (443 b-e). Glaucon is completely persuaded that a man whose reason conducts internal unity mastering irrational desires with spirited tenacity “would be beyond” coarse wrongdoings (443a); and that no other “cause” of this disposition of his is there but justice defined as a rational order of the soul (443b). Socrates draws the moral that one should become one’s own friend, creating a harmonious order within and arranging one’s active and intellectual life to produce and preserve that rational unity in the soul (443d-e).

Since both the city and the individual have revealed their “good and correct” form, Socrates wants to proceed with their “four forms of badness” (449a). This discussion is to be deferred for quite a while, however, when Adeimantus, after communicating with Polemarchus in whispers, arrests Socrates: “You appear to us to abandon and steal away from us a whole, and not the least, section of the speech so as not to go through it” (449c). The “community of women and children,” which idea Socrates had nonchalantly dropped in his description of the soldiers’ lifestyle, earning an easy approval from Glaucon (cf. 423e-424a), “makes a great, even the whole, difference to the constitution’s correctly or not correctly coming into being,” claims Adeimantus (449d). For it is actually about the matter of “procreation—how children will be

begotten and...reared" (449d). Adeimantus demands that Socrates properly address the issue. Not only does Glaucon now join the others in this request but Thrasymachus also speaks for the first time since Book 1 to add that Socrates could "in fact consider it as the resolution of us all" (450a). Socrates confesses that he was not unaware of the oversight himself, but deliberately let it slip "not to cause a lot of trouble" (450b). With the dodged topic brought to the fore, it is "as if from the beginning the speech is set in motion again about the constitution (*politeias*) [of the city we have considered as built]," Socrates frets (450a). It is "not easy" to take it up, for "many doubts" will be raised not only about its possibility but also about its adequacy (450c). Socrates is hesitant to make a speech that would seem to be "a mere wish" and afraid of "dragging my friends down with me" in sharing his uncertain and groping thoughts (450c-451a). Glaucon, betraying his characteristic boldness, saves everyone Socrates' prolonged evasion. With a good-humored laughter, he urges Socrates to "have confidence and speak"; "if we suffer unpleasantness from your speech," Socrates wouldn't be held responsible for the unintended offence (451b).

So assured, Socrates begins anew, commanding the keenest attention of all the major speakers of the first two books and taking a cue to embark on an earnest discussion from the laughter of Glaucon, reminiscent of Cephalus's exit with laughter in Book 1 that marked an earnest beginning of the conversation on justice (cf. 331d). After the apparent conclusion at the end of Book 4, the dramatic arrangements that open Book 5 refer us back to the first beginning and refresh our attention as if opening the second act of a drama, wherein the suspense is heightened, for "the speech...about the constitution" could be stirred up "as if from the beginning" (450a).

Socrates dubs the new beginning “the female [drama].” While he admits the need “to pick up again anew now what perhaps was necessary to speak then in its turn,” he also suspects that “this way might probably be correct” after all—“after completely having gone through the male drama, completing besides the female” (451b-c). Here we note a peculiar ambivalence Socrates implies about the discursive status of the exploration he is about to make. The investigation of “the community of women and children” supplements a neglected part of the already complete speech about the constitution that deserves special attention. But, as he puts it, Socrates is to treat it as an independent equivalent that can be juxtaposed to the foregoing speech as if part of a matching pair—the female half to accompany its male counterpart. The reason why Socrates can do this, imparting the discursive quality of the matching whole to a mere extracted part of the whole, is ironically because in the following “female” drama of his there will be nothing new that could not have been anticipated or implied by the logic of his “male drama.” The “male drama” after all could be “completely gone through” despite the omission that strikes Adeimantus and the rest of the company so significant (449c). Socrates unequivocally asserts that “for human beings born and educated as we described, according to my opinion there is no other correct acquisition and use of children and women than following that path along which we first directed them” (451c). Accordingly, Socrates proposes to “follow upon” the previous attempt “to establish in speech the men as guardians of a herd” and “prescribe the birth and rearing that are consistent” with it (451c-d). Therefore, the following discussion will be at once an introduction of a new subject and a reiteration of the same *logos*. A new subject will be made to carry the old *logos* according to which justice is reason, with spiritedness enlisted at its side, mastering (*kratein*) desires, in a way analogous to the “guardian” group made up of auxiliary warriors and “true guardian” rulers becoming masters of the

numerous provider groups, including farmers and craftsmen, likened to a “herd.” If the female drama could so significantly stir up doubts that Socrates fears “as if from the beginning the speech is set in motion again about the constitution,” therefore, it is not because, as Adeimantus seems to suspect, a seriously defective part threatens to ruin an otherwise salubrious speech, but because the seemingly salubrious speech about the city itself could be called into question wholesale when it is re-iterated on such an essential matter for the existence of a city as procreation.

Socrates expects, indeed, that the same *logos* presented in the “female” guise will raise much incredulity, “even more than what we went through before,” what with the purging of the many art forms deemed disruptive of stringent rationality and the absolute banishment of private possession of material wealth for the warrior-guardian class (450c). The acutely aroused “doubts” regarding both the possibility and the adequateness of the constitution, whose coming into being Socrates engineers *en logō*, turns out, however, to be a useful vehicle for Socrates’ discursive breakthrough—moving beyond the confines of the *logos* that gave the impression of completion to the city in what is dubbed a “male drama,” or the tri-partite city that served as an enlarged image of the human soul that satisfied Glaucon perfectly. The discursive pivot of the dynamics of this transition is *erōs*, the spontaneous mover of the whole soul (see 490a-b in comparison with 521d; see also *Phaedrus* 255), the fact of whose absence in the “male drama” becomes conspicuous in its female counterpart.

Socrates’ “law of women,” for which Socrates expects much ridicule, like a series of tough waves he has to swim through (453d), comprises two broad themes—male and female warrior-guardians “sharing all practices in common” from the naked-body training to the burden of war, and the “sacred” marriages arranged by sham lotteries to ensure eugenic reproduction.

Off-spring are to be taken immediately away from their mothers and nursed in a sort of a public pen with every device put up to prevent the mothers' recognition of their own children (458e; 460d).⁹⁷ Socrates insists that all these arrangements are made in such a way that "the speech is in agreement with itself" and "consistent with the rest of the constitution," and that they serve the unity, or oneness of the city that insures its happiness (457c; 461e; 462a-b). At the same time, however, he is not unaware that his "law of women" goes against some "innate necessity" of being "led to mixing with the others" (458d): "Or do I not seem to you to be speaking of necessities," Socrates asks Glaucon in the middle of his transition from the first to the second theme in the discussion of "the community of women and children for the guardians." (458d; 461e). "Not geometric but erotic necessities," responds Glaucon—as if to ask Socrates why "erotic necessities" should matter in their speech while they are, and have been, pursuing the "geometric" necessities. Nonetheless, Glaucon, hailed a "musical" (398e) and "erotic" (402d; 402e; 474d) man by Socrates, cannot seem to help adding that the erotic necessities, if scarcely relevant for their speech, "are likely to be more stinging than those others when it comes to persuading (*peithein*) and drawing (*helkein*) most of the folk" (458d). "Certainly," Socrates responds, but he proceeds with the agenda of "sacred" marriages at any rate, for "to intercourse disorderly is not holy in a city of the happy (*eudaimonōn*)" (458d-e).

Socrates' discussion of the "female" law admits of no concern for *erōs*; not only does he not allow room for it, but he does not even anticipate protests within the city against this denial.⁹⁸ No man or woman (in the guardian class) suffers a yearning to be with a special other, special for

⁹⁷ Throughout this discussion, the dwellers of the city are likened to domestic animals completely subject to external human control.

⁹⁸ Strauss (1964) points this out and suggests an abstraction from *erōs* as the defining discursive condition of the entire *Republic*. My reading in this chapter qualifies this broad characterization of an abstraction from *erōs*.

no other reason than that particular person happens to arouse the unwieldy sensation of “necessity” to be with him or her; no mother suffers for having to separate from her children (on the contrary, “a very easy kind, you are telling, of the child-bearing for the women guardians” Glaucon comments (460d)).⁹⁹ The city is supposed to be a good, harmonious, and happy one built according to nature (*kata phusin*; see also 466d). The above segment of exchange between Socrates and Glaucon, which is inserted in the flow of the discussion of “the woman’s law” like a trifling accident, however, indicates that the “nature” in operation in this city, or in the speech that brings it about in both its “male” and “female” iterations, is of the “geometric” kind. The “geometric necessities” strain to deliver *human* nature, insofar as human nature participates in the “erotic” kind of “nature.” Socrates is the last to be ignorant of it; and he teases Glaucon’s (and our) sense of “nature,” again with a dramatic fuss: “*Babai*, o dear comrade..a throng of lies and deceptions” will be requisite to run this natural arrangement (cf. 466d), which “the eminent rulers” of the city, like “a more courageous doctor,” should impose on the city like a strong dose of remedial “drugs” (459c-d). The utility of lies in the city is not a new idea either, as Socrates reminds his audience (459d): it featured in the “male drama” too, in the context of education in music (382c-d; 414b-415c).¹⁰⁰

When Socrates thus brings the discussion on the unanimously requested topic of “the community of women and children” to its end, Glaucon has in mind to raise a question he did not seem to feel the need for at the end of Book 4. Socrates proposes they proceed to “determine whether after all it is possible to bring about this community among human beings, like in other

⁹⁹ Saxonhouse (1976) observes that this series of arrangements in Book 5 “de-sexes” the female in the *Republic* and infers from this observation Plato’s warning against the attempt to equalize what is naturally different—the male and the female; the political and the philosophical.

¹⁰⁰ The conversation on music in Book 3 not incidentally ends with a short note on “*orthos erōs*,” correct love (402d-403a); and Socrates observes that it is only appropriate that a discourse on *ta musika* comes to an end at *ta tou kalou erotica*, the erotics of the beautiful (403c).

animals,”¹⁰¹ and Glaucon indeed “was going to take up” that very question (466d). Socrates digresses, however, as if to test Glaucon’s enthusiasm for the topic Socrates proposed himself. Glaucon’s interest is indeed keen: he brings back the question “if it is possible for this constitution to come into being and in what way it is possible,” and urges Socrates to concentrate only on this inquiry, “dismissing all the rest” (471c-e).

Erōs and philosopher rulers

If we read the *Republic* with an eye to understanding what kind of human image Socrates substitutes for Glaucon’s scoured statues-of-men and what kind of subjective psychical experience justice turns out to be given the psychical economy Socrates elaborates by means of building a city in speech, our analysis so far suggests that Socrates considers the image of a tripartite soul and its justice as rational control over desires with a spirited alert, while not utterly false, as a strained image and theory of a human and human justice squared to “geometric necessities.” The speech up to now is at best a roughly adumbrated “sketch” of who we are and what justice is like for us (504d; cf. 501a-b); for it stands to reason only if we completely forget about the erotic desire that leads us like an “innate necessity.” Only insofar as it is possible and adequate for us completely to put down this strong and spontaneous desire of *erōs* under the sovereign rule of “calculating” reason, would the sweepingly rationalist definition of justice given in Book 4 make sense.

Only now, when the abstraction from the desire of *erōs* as an “innate necessity” of interpersonal attraction is made conspicuous enough to stir up the question of possibility and

¹⁰¹ The aim of the education in Book 2-3 was producing men trained like pedigree dogs.

adequacy of the whole scheme of justice as unilateral rational control over desires, does Socrates share with Glaucon “so paradoxical an argument” of his, which introduces *erōs* as the fourth and most supreme element of the human psyche (472a). Just as provider, warrior/auxiliary guardian, and true guardian ruler classes in the city each represents desiring, spirited, and deliberative functions in the soul, another type or class of human Socrates now introduces, the philosopher, represents another class of function in the soul, the *erōtikos*. The *erōs* he brings up now, however, is not that of the “female” drama, directed to other persons, but a philosophical *erōs*, directed to eternal truth. All the same, *erōs* in either form remains the same innate drive in the soul towards *the other*; that the speech up to Book 4 is made in abstraction away from either form of *erōs* becomes retrospectively obvious. *Erōs* as a consuming desire that attracts or draws the soul toward truth is not reducible to calculating reason (cf. 436b-439c), nor is it to the irascible spirit; and while it is definitely a species of *epithumia*, it is not the indiscriminately acquisitive desire for material satisfaction either.¹⁰² With the entrance of this particular species of *epithumia* that cannot be squared with the discursive framework of the foregoing speech, a certain revision becomes necessary. The revision Socrates proposes is striking. The not utterly false rationalist ethics of justice should come under the rule of *erōs*—or to put it in the fashion of the political analogy that Socrates employs, it is possible for “the constitution we have now described in speech” to “ever come forth from nature” only when the philosophers rule the city (473d-e).

Socrates is aware “how very paradoxical it would be to say” this (473e); and now for the first time in the speech Socrates anticipates and tries to persuade the incredulous “many” who

¹⁰² Desires do not discriminate between good and bad in Socrates’ exposition of *epithumia* up to Book 4; whereas *erōs*, from the beginning—at least as part of the correct erotics—, is introduced as a desire of the beautiful (403a-c), which the bad cannot be.

would find this idea outrageous (474a; 498d-502a). The sensational provocation Socrates anticipates does not derive from the un-original rationalist thesis of Book 4—that reason should master the sundry desires, whose political analogue is the wise *oligoi* ruling over the rationally incompetent many. Rather, it is that reason is inferior to and therefore should come under this particular species of desire that has us drawn to truth like a passionately devoted lover; or its political analogue that only philosophers are truly wise and worthy to rule, not exactly because their reason is trained faithfully to serve the principles inculcated in them in the manner of “noble dogs” that welcome those who are known to them but angrily bark at those who are not (375e-376b), but because they abandon themselves to the desire for truth and are even ready to take on the first principles (511a-c, 533a-d; cf. 490b).¹⁰³

The idea of abandoning oneself to a desire, even if it is a desire for *truth* (or precisely because it is *supposedly* a desire for truth) can make many nervous. Socrates does not underestimate the challenge. When Glaucon, as we have seen above, urges Socrates to get back to the issue of possibility of the constitution (471c-e), which Socrates himself took up just a while ago before he has seemingly forgotten about it, Socrates turns dramatic once again: “All of a sudden you have made an attack on my argument, and you have no sympathy for my straying. Perhaps you don’t know that when I’ve barely escaped the two waves, you are now bringing the greatest and most difficult of the third-wave” (472a).¹⁰⁴ After Socrates finally reveals his opinion that for their city to be able to come into being, “political power and philosophy should coincide” in the way “the philosophic class should become the masters in the city” (473d; 501e),

¹⁰³ Socrates explains this as going beyond geometry.

¹⁰⁴ The first “two waves” that Socrates speaks of here refer to the ridicule he anticipates regarding his “law of women” that we reviewed above (457b-c). The series of three “waves” of criticism in Book 5 serves to bracket the section of the *Republic* in which the discussion revolves around the question of *erōs*. If the first two waves of criticism are expected responses to an abstraction from *erōs* in Socrates’ speech, “the third-wave,” in contrast, is caused by the entrance of *erōs* to Socrates’ speech.

Glaucon seems to sympathize with Socrates. Glaucon worries for Socrates' sake: "very many men, and not common ones, will on the spot throw off their clothes, and stripped for action, taking hold of whatever weapon falls under the hand of each, run full speed at you to work wonders. If you don't defend the speech and get away, you will pay the penalty in being scorned" (474a-b). Socrates agrees and sees the necessity to persuade the "disbelievers," as Glaucon puts it, by defining who "these philosophers" are and showing why only they are worthy "by nature" to "lead in the city" (474b-c).

Erōs is a key feature in defining these "*philosophous*," the only and necessary leaders of the city they are creating in speech. As Socrates begins his exposition of philosophers, he raises the question what it is like to "love something (*philein ti*)." He pursues the meaning of loving (*philein*), however, by teasingly appealing to the expertise of love "an erotic man (*andri erōtikō*)" like Glaucon must have (474d). Glaucon good-humoredly agrees to serve as a representative "of the erotic ones (*tōn erōtikōn*):" "I agree for the speech's sake (*tou logou charin*)" (475a). The switching from *philein* to *erōs* is indeed significant for the development of Socrates' *logos*. Socrates can now portray the characteristic relationship of the philosopher to truth as an existential stirring of the soul that stings much deeper and sharper than the feeling of gentle affection or kindly fondness, which range of friendly sentiment the verb *philein* can comfortably cover. The philosopher is a driven "desirer" of truth who "goes forward and does not lose the keenness of his *erōs* nor cease from it before he grasps the nature itself of each thing which is, with the part of the soul fit to grasp a thing of that sort" (475b; 490b).¹⁰⁵ This intense

¹⁰⁵ A similar description is made in the *Symposium*, 211e-212a.

desire characterizes the philosopher in the way the tri-partite structure of reason, spirit, and desire cannot adequately capture.

Of course, at this point in the speech, we are being asked to make a leap of faith to believe, on one hand, that there exists a certain metaphysical reality, a realm of “the *idea* of the good” (505a), or being itself, or eternal truth, or however it is named; and on the other, that the human soul is constituted by nature, less geometric than erotic at this point, to be able to make contact with, or to desire to make contact with, that transcendental reality. The part of the soul that manifests this function Socrates calls *erōs*, for its functional modality is much like the spontaneous, intense and discriminating love we experience toward certain other persons, which goes beyond a mere affectionate sentiment that we occasionally indulge. Socrates at any rate considers that philosophy is contingent on the above leap of faith (493e-494a) and on that condition offers that the distinction of philosophers from the rest consists in their being erotic toward truth. When Socrates offers that philosophers should rule in the city, therefore, he revises the simple rational asceticism to say that the power of reason should first be anchored to this fundamental desire of the soul which we ought to awaken, nurture and guard (532b-c). It is because this desire first fastens itself to truth that one can abandon to it and venture to go beyond the first principles in one’s workings of intellect (*noēsis*), which state of movement of mind not reducible to rational calculating, Socrates calls “dialectic” in the *Republic* (531d-532c). Only now do we have a complete vision of the human soul that has its own spontaneous motive force within.

The precarious erōs and human possibilities for good and evil

Now that the argument has moved to the terrain of faith, Glaucon finds it “on one hand extremely hard to accept, but on the other in another way hard not to accept” (532d). But Glaucon admires all the same Socrates’ achievement in presenting an image of man that has far exceeded his expectations (543c-544a): “All-beautiful ruling-men, o Socrates, just like a sculptor-maker you have completed (*apeirgasai*).”¹⁰⁶ Socrates adds, “and *ruling-women*” (540c). In Glaucon’s opinion, this image of “both city and man” is “more beautiful” than what Socrates had offered at the end of Book 4 (543d-544a). Socrates is content enough with it too to suggest that since they “have completed this discussion,” they summon again the postponed discussion of the four forms of degenerate constitutions (543c-544a).

The narrative of degeneration ends in Book 9 with a description of the tyrannical soul. Suddenly *erōs* appears again in the speech, without much warning, hesitation, or caution this time, to claim its sovereign leadership in the most wretched soul. In the soul in which the hierarchy between the calculating and desiring parts of the soul is inverted, “erotic love (*erōta*), like “the sting of longing” is planted within: “Then this leader (*prostatēs*) of the soul adopts madness as its bodyguard and becomes frenzied” (573a-b). That is why it has long been said that “Eros is a tyrant,” Socrates suggests (573b). The tyrannical person has Eros as his “sole-ruler (*monarchos*)” in the soul (575a). Captivated by unceasing desires, with Eros taking the lead for them all in the soul, the tyrannical person never finds peace from the frenzied stirring of desires and leads a lawless, friendless, and wretched life as in drunkenness and melancholia. While the sudden re-entry of *erōs* as a ruler of the tyrannical nature might seem abrupt and at odds with the foregoing discussion of philosophic nature as erotic, this return of *erōs* as the worst leader in the soul is foreshadowed in Socrates’ exposition of the philosophic nature when he warns against its

¹⁰⁶ The verb signifies complete artistic elaboration with color added to a sculpture (cf. 504d).

corruption (490e). The corruption of the best nature, according to Socrates, brings out outstandingly bad results (491d-e): “Or do you think that great injustices and pure wickedness originate in an ordinary nature...or that a weak nature is ever the cause of either great good or great evil” (491e)? The city as well as individuals must guard itself against “the best nature...destroyed and corrupted,” for “the greatest evils” are done to the cities and individuals alike by them (495a-b).

We recall that when Socrates first proposed to build a city in speech, he offered that as we watch the city come into being, we could “see not only its justice coming into being but its injustice” (369a). And Socrates seems to have had a good reason to postpone his survey of the degenerate cities until the just city has reached its most beautiful elevation, for before we have seen the philosophic city we could not have anticipated the tyrannical city. The underlying thematic thread that highlights this indeterminate ambivalence of human nature in the *Republic* is *erōs*.¹⁰⁷

The open-ended political argument of the Republic

I have presented a reading of the *Republic* shifting the emphasis from its apparently political argument to its exploration (*skepsis*) of a complex human nature. At the end of Book 9, Socrates depicts the inner world of a human person inhabited by three different life forms—a multi-headed monster, a lion, and a human (588c-d). The irony is that a human can never be human simply by slaying the inner monster and lion, rather we should learn to live with them all.

¹⁰⁷ E. R. Dodds (1951, 218) observes that “Eros has a special importance in Plato’s thought as being the one mode of experience which brings together the two natures of man, the divine self and the tethered beast...It spans the whole compass of human personality, and makes the one empirical bridge between man as he is and man as he might be.”

The narrative of the *Republic* certainly invites us to consider imaginatively how the art, education, socio-economic arrangements, sexual and reproductive relationships, and last but not least distribution of political power in the city would affect the Socratic task of achieving personal inner harmony. I believe that in most of the *Republic*, Plato is making his own earnest contribution to that imagination, either out of deep skepticism or out of strong attraction to the reforms he has Socrates propose. But I am not inclined to believe that the only or the best questions for us to ask in reading the *Republic* with an eye to its political argument is whether he is serious or not with this or that particular item of legislation, or with the entire constitutional arrangement of philosopher-rulership. Leo Strauss (1964, 106) suggests that the *Republic* might well be an “aporetic” work about justice despite its appearance otherwise. I would also like to suggest that its political argument is more aporetic and exploratory than certain and conclusive. It invites us to reflect on the question of a good and just political order from the perspective of the human possibilities for both good and bad that we might want to discipline and care after.

Conclusion

There is an undeniable attraction in the image of an individual standing untied, unencumbered, and uncommitted. We cherish, even as we cannot ever entirely shed the uneasy suspense of uncertainty, the serene independence that opens up to un-prescribed, undetermined, and unbidden possibilities from which we could freely choose. The imagination of absolute freedom that releases one from confining limitations, obligations, and necessities is hardly a modern invention. Whether from the hardship of the unrelenting necessity of labor or the weariness of luxury or the evident fact of mortality, if nothing else, it is hard to be human without knowing that a certain confinement and lack of control and choice, among other things, define humanity. It may very well be for that reason that literary and artistic representations, religious or not, of unfettered serenity as an idealized state of being abound in most human

societies across time and place. Plato's *Phaedo*, in which Socrates on the day of his death, without ever moving his body through long hours of speech, presents philosophy as rehearsal of the absolute liberty only death brings to the soul, can be counted as an example in this genre of imagination.

The modern political theory of liberal democracy, however, has invented a unique use of this universal imagination of absolute freedom by positing it as an original and natural human position, from which to launch a political reasoning of just or justifiable forms of constitution. The proposition of the unencumbered natural liberty of an individual human person provides liberal democratic theory with a very parsimonious line of theoretical argument and a powerful rhetorical force in advocating the legitimacy of democracy and condemning the violence of tyranny. For in the face of absolute liberty in the origin, any power but that derives its right from voluntary consent is a flagrant violation. Great modern political thinkers of liberty such as John Locke, Jean-Jacque Rousseau, and Immanuel Kant flesh out with subtle and perceptive observations of the human condition the skeleton of the natural-liberty-based-political-legitimacy argument. But when it comes to political practice and utility, it is the parsimonious rhetoric of violation that effectively enrages, as well as justifies that rage, that has proven handy for revolutionary purposes in the emergence and spread of modern democratic constitutionalism.

Once the question of constitutional legitimacy is settled, the discourse of liberal democracy based on the idea of natural liberty also has the virtue of inculcating the ethos of tolerance founded on the recognition of the moral equality of every individual. When it comes to the gritty realities of democratic public life, in which we search for optimal policies in the face of many conflicting opinions and variously inhibiting conditions, the idea of natural liberty also regulates democratic deliberation by excluding as illegitimate those options that fail to respect

the dignity of every individual human life. The imagination of liberty as an original human condition in the modern liberal discourse of democracy and liberty, therefore, not only legitimizes democracy as a constitutional form but supports that form by equipping its actors with requisite ethical resources, at the same time regulating their deliberation substantively, at least with the negative elimination of certain choices.

Acknowledging these intellectual merits of political reasoning founded on the proposition of individual natural liberty, however, I still wanted to explore in this dissertation the possibility for an alternative discourse of liberty that does not depend on such a patently unrealistic human ontology. For if we could appreciate the value of democratic liberty as a constitutional principle, derive requisite ethical resources for democratic processes that discipline moral conceit and cultivate respect for differences and individuality, and find some substantive anchor that regulates democratic deliberation, and do all this without having to imagine ourselves in a position of independence and liberty that we hardly ever inhabit, I would find that alternative more attractive. Plato's investigations on the problem of *erōs* supply the basis for such an alternative discourse.

Love in general, except as an undiluted and undistracted form of self-love, evokes plurality and relation. Love in general is also associated with pleasure. The love the word *erōs* refers to in Greek, compared to *philia* and *agapē*, however, has a more distinctly physical and more intensely visceral dimension. And that renders *erōs* problematic: not only does erotic relation have a potential to degenerate into a purely physical relation, in which the erotic partner is objectified, but its aggressively spontaneous nature also raises the question of limits on conscious rational self-control. Plato takes note of these problems in Book 9 of the *Republic* and in the first speech of Socrates in the *Phaedrus* as well as Pausanias's speech in the *Symposium*.

Yet, the overwhelming irrationality and the loud announcement of embodied-ness notwithstanding, both of which Socrates characterizes in Plato's dialogues as an index of human un-freedom, Plato in the *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, and *Symposium* attempts to situate the most rational and most liberating human endeavor, philosophy, within the condition of *erōs*. As a result, we are exposed to an account of human endeavor for happiness embedded in the condition of plurality, embodied mortality, irreducible irrationality, and relation to supra-human reality.

While in none of these dialogues does Socrates promote democratic liberty expressly, he acknowledges the universal human relation to and yearning for the *idea* of the beautiful and the good; our dependence on encounters with particular persons and things for cultivating that relation to truth; and the barely possible prospect of achieving perfect moral excellence even as we are prodded by him to keep to that aspiration. Promotion and even celebration of the interchange with the world with an expectation of encounters with the yet unknown, on one hand, and discipline against assuming moral superiority and certainty in relation to other persons and in relation to truth, on the other, uphold the idea that everyone deserves moral respect and an active intellectual and public life for moral development. Liberty is a condition of moral growth, and the moral growth of individuals is a condition of prospering political life for the community. Human beings cannot be free by nature in the sense of an unfettered serenity of being; yet this does not mean that we do not deserve and cannot cherish the political life of liberty, where we meet one another and learn something of our own selves and of others through these encounters, aspiring to broaden and refine our understanding of the *idea* of the good, even as we will more often than not find ourselves compelled to make, unmake and remake provisional decisions about the good as the particular demands of the political exigencies of the given moment oblige us to do.

In the last instance, the proposition of an erotic human relation to truth is as speculative as the proposition of an original human liberty. It might be an even stranger foundation on which to situate one's practical reasoning. Yet, like any other genre of reasoning, political reasoning stands on a first principle for which no foundational theoretical demonstration is available. If we have to acknowledge the necessity of an article of faith undergirding our intellectual endeavor, I think it is still advantageous that we avail ourselves to a different vision of liberty the proposition of an erotic human ontology opens up. For the structure of motivations that lead us into an active engagement with the world changes when we think of ourselves as erotic beings rather than imagine ourselves in a position of original liberty. With the latter imagination, there always looms a strong urge to withdraw from the world at large, for it demands of us a renouncement of the original property of independence and unencumbered liberty. The incentive to enter the world is either to protect my property interest in life, liberty, and money (as in the classical Lockean liberal discourse), or to display what I consider to be my authentic self to the public (as in the Arendtian variant of liberal individualism). I tend to believe that these two motivations, *amour-de-soi* and *amour propre*, to borrow Rousseau's words, express some ineluctable demands of the human psyche and body. Nonetheless, I also think that they make a very limiting vision of the self and the world it inhabits and the relation between the two. With the erotic ontology, on the other hand, we are encouraged to trust that every human person strives to preserve and cultivate the innate relation to truth in one's soul. Whether the other person promotes our property interest or not, and whether she gives acclamations for our speeches and actions or not, our encounter and engagement with her always has the potential to reveal a piece of truth in the world to us, which revelation, in turn, always has the potential to re-

write our understanding of who we are. This motivation of *learning* might not be able to replace the motivations of property and vanity entirely. Yet, it can at least usefully complement them.

The availability of a principled discourse of liberty that does not depend on a proposition of an original liberty can also contribute to the more fruitful cross-cultural dialogues about liberty and democracy, by separating the constitutional question of liberty from a particular and local discourse founded on an individualist liberal ontology. While more states are officially adopting republican constitutions with the democratic element of liberty essentially embedded in them, local cultural and discursive resources vary from one state to another. If it is the peculiarly Platonic conception of *erōs* that enables us to construct around it a theory of liberty, in other cultures with different intellectual traditions and environments it could be different concepts that serve the similar discursive role as a conceptual focal point for a political imagination of liberty. I hope my studies of Platonic *erōs* in this dissertation could be situated within that broader intellectual trend of pluralizing the discourse of liberty itself.

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