

INTRODUCTORY DIALOGUE

8

SYMPOSIUM

good a speech in praise of Love as he is capable of giving, in proper order from left to right. And let us begin with Phaedrus, who is at the head of the table and is, in addition, the father of our subject."

"No one will vote against that, Eryximachus," said Socrates. "How could I vote 'No,' when the only thing I say I understand is the art of love? Could Agathon and Pausanias? Could Aristophanes, who thinks of nothing but Dionysus and Aphrodite? No one I can see here now could vote against your proposal.

177E

"And though it's not quite fair to those of us who have to speak last, if the first speeches turn out to be good enough and to exhaust our subject, I promise we won't complain. So let Phaedrus begin, with the blessing of Fortune; let's hear his praise of Love."

178A

They all agreed with Socrates, and pressed Phaedrus to start. Of course, Aristodemus couldn't remember exactly what everyone said, and I myself don't remember everything he told me. But I'll tell you what he remembered best, and what I consider the most important points.

176E

At that point they all agreed not to get drunk that evening; they decided to drink only as much as pleased them.

"It's settled, then," said Eryximachus. "We are resolved to force no one to drink more than he wants. I would like now to make a further motion: let us dispense with the flute-girl who just made her entrance; let her play for herself or, if she prefers, for the women in the house. Let us instead spend our evening in conversation. If you are so minded, I would like to propose a subject."

177A

They all said they were quite willing, and urged him to make his proposal. So Eryximachus said:

"Let me begin by citing Euripides' *Melanippe*: 'Not mine the tale.' What I am about to tell belongs to Phaedrus here, who is deeply indignant on this issue, and often complains to me about it:

"Eryximachus, he says, 'isn't it an awful thing! Our poets have composed hymns in honor of just about any god you can think of; but has a single one of them given one moment's thought to the god of love, ancient and powerful as he is? As for our fancy intellectuals, they have written volumes praising Heracles and other heroes (as did the distinguished Prodicus). Well, perhaps *that's* not surprising, but I've actually read a book by an accomplished author who saw fit to extol the usefulness of salt! How *could* people pay attention to such trifles and never, not even once, write a proper hymn to Love? How could anyone ignore so great a god?"

177B

177C

"Now, Phaedrus, in my judgment, is quite right. I would like, therefore, to take up a contribution, as it were, on his behalf, and gratify his wish. Besides, I think this a splendid time for all of us here to honor the god. If you agree, we can spend the whole evening in discussion, because I propose that each of us give as

177D

6. "The art of love": *ta erōtika*. See 198D1-2, 201D5, 207A5, 207C3, C7, 209E5 (where we have rendered it as "the rites of love"). A literal translation would be "erotics," as the formation is parallel to that of *ta physika* ("physics," or the science of nature) from *physis* ("nature"). In its usage in the *Symposium*, *ta erōtika* seems to range over both the science of love and the proper pursuit of love. On Socrates' claim to special knowledge in this area, see *Lysis* 204C and 206A.

though on many other points I agree with Phaedrus, I do not agree with this: that Love is more ancient than Kronos and Iapetus. No, I say that he is the youngest of the gods and stays young forever.

195C

Those old stories Hesiod and Parmenides tell about the gods—those things happened under Necessity, not Love, if what they say is true. For not one of all those violent deeds would have been done—no castrations, no imprisonments—if Love had been present among them. There would have been peace and brotherhood instead—~~as there has been~~ now as long as Love has been king of the gods.

195D

So he is young. And besides being young, he is delicate. It takes a poet as good as Homer to show how delicate the god is. For Homer says that Mischief is a god and that she is delicate—well, that her feet are delicate, anyway! He says:

... hers are delicate feet: not on the ground
Does she draw nigh; she walks instead upon the heads of men.³²

A lovely proof, I think, to show how delicate she is: she doesn't walk on anything hard; she walks only on what is soft. We shall use the same proof about Love, then, to show that he is delicate. For he walks not on earth, not even on people's skulls, which are not really soft at all, but in the softest of all the things that are there he walks, there he has his home. For he makes his home in the characters, in the souls, of gods and men—and not even in every soul that comes along: when he encounters a soul with a harsh character, he turns away; but when he finds a soft and gentle character, he settles down in it. Always, then, he is touching with his feet and with the whole of himself what is softest in the softest places. He must therefore be most delicate.

195E

196A

He is youngest, then, and most delicate; in addition he has a fluid, supple shape. For if he were hard, he would not be able to unfold a soul completely or escape notice when he first entered it or withdrew. Besides, his graceful good looks prove that he is balanced and fluid in his nature. Everyone knows that Love has

32. *Iliad* xix.92–93. "Mischief" translates *atē*.

THE SPEECH OF AGATHON³⁰

I WISH FIRST TO SPEAK of how I ought to speak, and only then to speak. In my opinion, you see, all those who have spoken before me did not so much celebrate the god as congratulate human beings on the good things that come to them from the god. But who it is who gave these gifts, what he is like—no one has spoken about that. Now, only one method is correct for every praise, no matter whose: you must explain what qualities in the subject of your speech enable him to give the benefits for which we praise him. So now, in the case of Love, it is right for us to praise him first for what he is and afterwards for his gifts.

195A

I maintain, then, that while all the gods are happy, Love—if I may say so without giving offence—is the happiest of them all, for he is the most beautiful and the best. His great beauty lies in this: First, Phaedrus, he is the youngest of the gods.³¹ He proves my point himself by fleeing old age in headlong flight, fast-moving though it is (that's obvious—it comes after us faster than it should). Love was born to hate old age and will come nowhere near it. Love always lives with young people and is one of them: the old story holds good that like is always drawn to like. And

195B

30. Agathon, the writer of tragedies, was famous for his personal beauty, for the originality of his plays, and for the influence on his writing of Sophistic rhetoric. Plato's *Protagoras* (315D–E) shows him listening to the Sophist Prodicus, and the speech here shows him to have been a disciple of Gorgias' style in rhetoric. Aristophanes satirized his style in the *Thesmophoriazousai* (101 ff) and speaks of his effeminacy (191–92). All Athens apparently knew that he was loved by Pausanias (see note 19).

31. See 178B.

extraordinary good looks, and between ugliness and Love there is unceasing war.³³

And the exquisite coloring of his skin! The way the god consort with flowers shows that. For he never settles in anything, be it a body or a soul, that cannot flower or has lost its bloom. His place is wherever it is flowery and fragrant; there he settles, there he stays.

Enough for now about the beauty of the god, though much remains still to be said. After this, we should speak of Love's moral character.³⁴ The main point is that Love is neither the cause nor the victim of any injustice; he does no wrong to gods or men, nor they to him. If anything has an effect on him, it is never by violence, for violence never touches Love. And the effects he has on others are not forced, for every service we give to love we give willingly. And whatever one person agrees on with another, when both are willing, that is right and just; so say "the laws that are kings of society."³⁵

And besides justice, he has the biggest share of moderation.³⁶

33. Here and at 195B Agathon is probably poking fun at the man who shares his couch—Socrates. Now long past his youth and never good-looking, Socrates is nevertheless no stranger to love, as everyone present knows.

34. "Moral character": *aretē*. Justice, Moderation, Bravery, and Wisdom are four cardinal virtues (excellences of character), the same four that Socrates will treat in the *Republic*. Here Agathon methodically covers all four in his encomium, assigning them to Love on the basis of a series of palpable confusions: Justice he equates wrongly with nonviolence, courage and moderation with power, wisdom with technical skill.

35. "The laws that are kings of society": a proverbial expression attributed by Aristotle to the fourth-century liberal thinker and rhetorician Alcidas (*Rhetoric* 1406A17–23).

36. "Moderation": *sophrosunē*. The word can be translated also as "temperance" and, most literally, "sound-mindedness." It is often wrongly translated as "self-control." Plato and Aristotle generally contrast *sophrosunē* as a virtue with self-control: the person with *sophrosunē* is naturally well-tempered in every way and so does not need to control himself, or hold himself back. Here Agathon plays on the idea of self-control, losing the sense in which *sophrosunē* is a real excellence of character. In any event, *sophrosunē* is not the sort of thing that one could have "the biggest share of." The passage is meant in fun.

For moderation, by common agreement, is power over pleasures and passions, and no pleasure is more powerful than Love! But if they are weaker, they are under the power of Love, and *he* has the power; and because he has power over pleasures and passions, Love is exceptionally moderate.

And as for manly bravery, "Not even Ares can stand up to" Love!³⁷ For Ares has no hold on Love, but Love does on Ares—love of Aphrodite, so runs the tale.³⁸ But he who has hold is more powerful than he who is held; and so, because Love has power over the bravest of the others, he is bravest of them all.

Now I have spoken about the god's justice, moderation, and bravery; his wisdom remains.³⁹ I must try not to leave out anything that can be said on this. In the first place—to honor our profession as Eryximachus did his⁴⁰—the god is so skilled a poet that he can make others into poets: once Love touches him, anyone becomes a poet.

... how'er uncultured he had been before.⁴¹

This, we may fittingly observe, testifies that Love is a good poet, good, in sum, at every kind of artistic production. For you can't give to another what you don't have yourself, and you can't teach what you don't know.

And as to the production of animals—who will deny that they are all born and begotten through Love's skill?

And as for artisans and professionals—don't we know that whoever has this god for a teacher ends up in the light of fame,

37. From Sophocles, fragment 235: "Even Ares cannot withstand Necessity." Ares is the god of war. Here Agathon treats Courage (*andreia*) simply as the ability to win a contest.

38. See *Odyssey* viii.266–366. Aphrodite's husband Hephaestus made a snare that caught Ares in bed with Aphrodite.

39. "Wisdom" translates *sophia*, which in Agathon's usage is roughly equivalent to *technē* (professional skill), and refers mainly to the ability to produce things, an ability which should not in itself be counted an excellence of character. We have accordingly used "wisdom" to translate *sophia* in the first instance; afterwards in this passage it is "skill" or "art."

40. See 186B, where Eryximachus gives pride of place to the art of medicine.

41. Euripides, fr. 663, *Sitheneboea*; quoted also at *Wasps* 1074.

while a man untouched by Love ends in obscurity? Apollo, for one, invented archery, medicine, and prophecy when desire and love⁴² showed the way. Even he, therefore, would be a pupil of Love, and so would the Muses in music, Hephaestus in bronze work, Athena in weaving, and Zeus in "the governance of gods and men."⁴³

That too is how the gods' quarrels were settled, once Love came to be among them—love of beauty, obviously, because love is not drawn to ugliness. Before that, as I said in the beginning,⁴⁴ and as the poets say, many dreadful things happened among the gods, because Necessity was king. But once this god was born, all goods came to gods and men alike through love of beauty.

This is how I think of Love, Phaedrus: first, he is himself the most beautiful and the best; after that, if anyone else is at all like that, Love is responsible. I am suddenly struck by a need to say something in poetic meter,⁴⁵ that it is he who—

42. The desire, evidently, is simply for success in each of these *technai* (see Dover *ad loc.*). "Love" is used as equivalent to desire, to facilitate the slide to "Love is the teacher." By this equivocating line of reasoning, Love would be the teacher of anyone who desired to learn.

Contrast this with Pausanias' speech (where the love that teaches is between a suitable role model and an aspiring youth) and with Socrates' speech (where it is love of absolute Beauty, manifesting itself first in love for a boy).

43. The construction is unusual, and this has suggested to most editors that this is another quotation from poetry, but we can only speculate as to the source.

44. 195C.

45. The lines that follow (197C5–197E5) are Agathon's own composition; they are an extreme parody of the style introduced by the Sophist Gorgias, whose exciting method of speaking had taken Athens by storm about ten years before the dramatic date of this dialogue.

The speech displays a rich variety of lyric meters, and is laced with internal rhymes, balanced phrases, and the other poetic devices Gorgias taught his students to use in formal speaking. It is in fact notably more poetical in its use of meter than the examples we have from Gorgias, as Dover points out. This invites us to think of the passage as a parody not only of Gorgias, but of Agathon's own style as well, in the parts of his tragedies that were in lyric meters. See the similar passage in the encomium by Gorgias on Athenian war heroes (fragment B6), and the parody of Agathon in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazousai*, 101 ff.



*Gives peace to men and stillness to the sea,
Lays winds to rest, and careworn men to sleep.*

Love fills us with togetherness and drains all of our divisiveness away. Love calls gatherings like these together. In feasts, in dances, and in ceremonies, he gives the lead. Love moves us to mildness, removes from us wildness. He is giver of kindness, never of meanness. Gracious, kindly⁴⁶—let wise men see and gods admire! Treasure to lovers, envy to others, father of elegance, luxury, delicacy, grace, yearning, desire. Love cares well for good men, cares not for bad ones. In pain, in fear, in desire, or speech, Love is our best guide and guard, he is our comrade and our savior. Ornament of all gods and men, most beautiful leader and the best! Every man should follow Love, sing beautifully his hymns, and join with him in the song he sings that charms the mind of god or man.

This, Phaedrus, is the speech I have to offer. Let it be dedicated to the god, part of it in fun, part of it moderately serious, as best I could manage.

When Agathon finished, Aristodemus said, everyone there burst into applause, so becoming to himself⁴⁷ and to the god did they think the young man's speech.

Then Socrates glanced at Eryximachus and said, "Now do you think I was foolish to feel the fear I felt before?⁴⁸ Didn't I speak like a prophet a while ago when I said that Agathon would give an amazing speech and I would be tongue-tied?"

"You were prophetic about one thing, I think," said Eryximachus, "that Agathon would speak well. But you, tongue-tied? No, I don't believe that."

"Bless you," said Socrates. "How am I not going to be tongue-tied, I or anyone else, after a speech delivered with such beauty and variety? The other parts may not have been so wonderful, but that at the end! Who would not be struck dumb on

46. Dover prints Usener's emendation of ἀγαθός for ἀγαθός, and we have translated this.

47. "To himself": as the youngest and best-looking man present, he has "appropriately" emphasized youth and good looks.

48. By playing with "fear" in this way, Socrates makes fun of the alliterative style Agathon has been using at the end of his speech.

hearing the beauty of the words and phrases? Anyway, I was worried that I'd not be able to say anything that came close to them in beauty, and so I would almost have run away and escaped, if there had been a place to go. And, you see, the speech reminded me of Gorgias, so that I actually experienced what Homer describes: I was afraid that Agathon would end by sending the Gorgian head,⁴⁹ awesome at speaking in a speech, against my speech, and this would turn me to stone by striking me dumb. Then I realized how ridiculous I'd been to agree to join with you in praising Love and to say that I was a master of the art of love, when I knew nothing whatever of this business, of how anything whatever ought to be praised.⁵⁰ In my foolishness, I thought you should tell the truth about whatever you praise, that this should be your basis, and that from this a speaker should select the most beautiful truths and arrange them most suitably. I was quite vain, thinking that I would talk well⁵¹ and that I knew the truth about praising anything whatever. But now it appears that this is not what it is to praise anything whatever; rather, it is to apply to the object the grandest and the most beautiful qualities, whether he actually has them or not. And if they are false, that is no objection; for the proposal, apparently, was that everyone here make the rest of us think he is praising Love—and not that he actually praise him. I think that is why you stir up every word and apply it to Love; your description of him and his gifts is designed to make him look better and more beautiful than anything else—to ignorant listeners, plainly, for of course he wouldn't look that way to those who knew. And your praise did seem beautiful and respectful.

49. "Gorgian head" is a pun on "Gorgon's head." Agathon had parodied the style of Gorgias, and this style was considered to be irresistibly powerful. According to mythology, the sight of a Gorgon's head (such as Medusa's) would turn a man to stone. Homer tells of the threat of a Gorgon's head to Odysseus (*Odyssey* xi.633–35).

50. Rhetoric as practiced by Gorgias and his followers was famous for being at the service of any cause, good or bad. Here Socrates gently reminds his audience of this charge and alludes to Agathon's method for praising anyone (195A2).

51. Socrates here uses a pun; the word for "talk" is a homonym for "lover" (*erōn*).

But I didn't even know the method for giving praise; and it was in ignorance that I agreed to take part in this. So "the tongue" promised, and "the mind" did not.⁵² Goodbye to that! I'm not giving another eulogy using that method, not at all—I wouldn't be able to do it!—but, if you wish, I'd like to tell the truth my way. I want to avoid any comparison with your speeches, so as not to give you a reason to laugh at me. So look, Phaedrus, would a speech like this satisfy your requirement? You will hear the truth about Love, and the words and phrasing will take care of themselves."

Then Aristodemus said that Phaedrus and the others urged him to speak in the way he thought was required, whatever it was.

"Well then, Phaedrus," said Socrates, "allow me to ask Agathon a few little questions, so that, once I have his agreement, I may speak on that basis."

"You have my permission," said Phaedrus. "Ask away."

199B

199C

52. The allusion is to Euripides, *Hippolytus* 612.

SOCRATES⁵³ QUESTIONS AGATHON

wanted to give me a good answer,⁵⁶ that it's of a son or a daughter that a father is the father. Wouldn't you?"

"Certainly," said Agathon.

"Then does the same go for the mother?"

He agreed to that also.

"Well, then," said Socrates, "answer a little more fully, and you will understand better what I want. If I should ask, 'What about this: a brother, just insofar as he is a brother,⁵⁷ is he the brother of something or not?'"

He said that he was.

"And he's of a brother or a sister, isn't he?"

He agreed.

"Now try to tell me about love," he said. "Is Love the love of nothing or of something?"

"Of something, surely!"

"Then keep this object of love in mind, and remember what it is. But tell me this much: does Love desire that of which it is the love, or not?"

"Certainly," he said.

"At the time he desires and loves something, does he actually have what he desires and loves at that time, or doesn't he?"

"He doesn't. At least, that wouldn't be likely,"⁵⁸ he said.

"Instead of what's *likely*," said Socrates, "ask yourself whether it's *necessary* that this be so: a thing that desires desires something of which it is in need; otherwise, if it were not in need, it would not desire it. I can't tell you, Agathon, how strongly it strikes me that this is necessary. But how about you?"

56. "A good answer": Here and elsewhere in questioning Agathon, Socrates uses forms of *kalos*, which in other contexts means "beautiful." Socrates chooses this term of commendation to suit Agathon's interest in the aesthetic qualities of love.

57. "Just insofar as he is a brother": literally, "that which a brother is." Such language usually refers to a Platonic Form. Here Socrates asks after what it is to be a brother; his point is that being a brother involves being the brother of another sibling.

58. The standard of what is likely (*to eikos*) was associated with Gorgias and his school of orators. See *Phaedrus* 267A.

AFTER THAT, said Aristodemus, Socrates began:⁵⁴ "Indeed, Agathon, my friend, I thought you led the way beautifully into your speech when you said that one should first show the qualities of Love himself, and only then those of his deeds. I much admire that beginning. Come, then, since you have beautifully and magnificently expounded his qualities in other ways, tell me this, too, about Love. Is Love such as to be a love of something or of nothing? I'm not asking if he is born of some mother or father,⁵⁵ (for the question whether Love is love of mother or of father would really be ridiculous), but it's as if I'm asking this about a father—whether a father is the father of something or not. You'd tell me, of course, if you

53. It is characteristic of Socrates as Plato represents him that, instead of giving a speech as his own, he first questions the previous speaker and then supplies a speech as coming from someone else. The views presented by Socrates, however, are generally held by scholars to be those of Plato and not those of the historical Socrates (see our Introduction, p. xii). But readers in search of Plato's own views should keep in mind that Plato is the author of all seven speeches.

54. In contrast with Agathon's, Socrates' style in these early questions is deliberately rough; the structure of his sentences is governed by the complex points he is trying to make.

55. Socrates puns here on "of" (expressed in Greek by the genitive case). He is treating love (*erōs*) here as a species of desire, which must be desire of something. It will follow that love is not symmetrical: if A loves or desires B, it does not follow that B loves or desires A. See above, p. 11, n. 16 (on Phaedrus' speech), and below, 205D.

"I think so too."

"Good. Now then, would someone who is tall, want to be tall? Or someone who is strong want to be strong?"

"Impossible, on the basis of what we've agreed."

"Presumably because no one is in need of those things he already has."

"True."

"But maybe a strong man could want to be strong," said Socrates, "or a fast one fast, or a healthy one healthy: in cases like these, you might think people really do want to be things they already are and do want to have qualities they already have—I bring them up so they won't deceive us. But in these cases, Agathon, if you stop to think about them, you will see that these people are what they are at the present time, whether they want to be or not by a logical necessity.⁵⁹ And who, may I ask, would ever bother to desire what's necessary in any event? But when someone says 'I am healthy, but that's just what I want to be,' or 'I am rich, but that's just what I want to be,' or 'I desire the very things that I have,' let us say to him: 'You already have riches and health and strength in your possession, my man; what you want is to possess these things in time to come, since in the present, whether you want to or not, you have them. Whenever you say, I desire what I already have, ask yourself whether you don't mean this: I want the things I have now to be mine in the future as well.' Wouldn't he agree?"

According to Aristodemus, Agathon said that he would.

So Socrates said, "Then this is what it is to love something which is not at hand, which the lover does not have: it is to desire the preservation of what he now has in time to come, so that he will have it then."

"Quite so," he said.

"So such a man or anyone else who has a desire desires what

59. It is necessary, as a matter of logic, that a strong man is strong. What is not necessary, as Socrates will point out, is that a strong man remain strong.

is not at hand and not present, what he does not have, and what he is not, and that of which he is in need; for such are the objects of desire and love."

"Certainly," he said.

"Come, then," said Socrates. "Let us review the points on which we've agreed. Aren't they, first, that Love is the love of something, and, second, that he loves things of which he has a present need?"⁶⁰

"Yes," he said.

"Now, remember, in addition to these points, what you said in your speech about what it is that Love loves. If you like, I'll remind you. I think you said something like this: that the gods' quarrels were settled by love of beautiful things, for there is no love of ugly ones.⁶¹ Didn't you say something like that?"

"I did," said Agathon.

"And that's a suitable thing to say, my friend," said Socrates. "But if this is so, wouldn't Love have to be a desire for beauty, and never for ugliness?"

He agreed.

"And we also agreed that he loves just what he needs and does not have."

"Yes," he said.

"So Love needs beauty, then, and does not have it."

"Necessarily," he said.

"So, if something needs beauty and has got no beauty at all, would you still say that it is beautiful?"

"Certainly not."

"Then do you still agree that Love is beautiful, if those things are so?"

Then Agathon said, "It turns out, Socrates, I didn't know what I was talking about in that speech."

"It was a beautiful speech, anyway, Agathon," said Socrates. "Now take it a little further. Don't you think that good things are always beautiful as well?"

60. The first point was agreed at 200A1, the second at 200E6.
61. 197B3-5.

"I do."

"Then if Love needs beautiful things, and if all good things are beautiful, he will need good things too."

"As for me, Socrates," he said, "I am unable to contradict you. Let it be as you say."

"Then it's the truth, my beloved Agathon, that you are unable to contradict," he said. "It is not hard at all to contradict Socrates."

DIOTIMA⁶² QUESTIONS SOCRATES

NOW I'LL LET YOU GO. I shall try to go through for you the speech about Love I once heard from a woman of Mantinea, Diotima—a woman who was wise about many things besides this: once she even put off the plague for ten years by telling the Athenians what sacrifices to make. She is the one who taught me the art of love, and I shall go through her speech as best I can on my own, using what Agathon and I have agreed to as a basis.
Following your lead, Agathon, one should first describe who Love is and what he is like, and afterwards describe his works. . . .⁶³

201D

I think it will be easiest for me to proceed the way Diotima did and tell you how she questioned me. You see, I had told her almost the same things Agathon told me just now: that Love is a great god and that he belongs to beautiful things.⁶⁴ And she used the very same arguments against me that I used against Agathon; she showed how, according to my very own speech, Love is neither beautiful nor good.

So I said, "What do you mean, Diotima? Is Love ugly, then, and bad?"

62. Diotima is apparently a fictional character contrived by Socrates for this occasion. See the introduction and our notes on 202D4 and 205D10.
63. See Agathon's introduction at 195A, and Socrates' ironical allusion to the method at 199A–B.

64. "That he belongs to beautiful things": The Greek is ambiguous between "Love loves beautiful things" (objective genitive) and "Love is one of the beautiful things" (partitive genitive). Agathon had asserted the former (197B5, 201A5), and this will be a premise in Diotima's argument, but he asserted the latter as well (195A7), and this is what Diotima proceeds to refute.

But she said, "Watch your tongue! Do you really think that, if a thing is not beautiful, it has to be ugly?"

202A

"I certainly do."

"And if a thing's not wise, it's ignorant? Or haven't you found out yet that there's something in between wisdom and ignorance?"

"What's that?"

"It's judging things correctly without being able to give a reason. Surely you see that this is not the same as knowing—for how could knowledge be unreasoning? And it's not ignorance either—for how could what hits the truth be ignorance? Correct judgment, of course, has this character: it is *in between* understanding and ignorance."

202B

"True," said I, "as you say."

"Then don't force whatever is not beautiful to be ugly, or whatever is not good to be bad. It's the same with Love: when you agree he is neither good nor beautiful, you need not think he is ugly and bad; he could be something in between," she said.

"Yet everyone agrees he's a great god," I said.

"Only those who don't know?" she said. "Is that how you mean 'everyone'? Or do you include those who do know?"

"Oh, everyone together."

And she laughed. "Socrates, how could those who say that he's not a god at all agree that he's a great god?"

202C

"Who says that?" I asked.

"You, for one," she said, "and I for another."

"How can you say this!" I exclaimed.

"That's easy," said she. "Tell me, wouldn't you say that all gods are beautiful and happy?⁶⁵ Surely you'd never say a god is not beautiful or happy?"

"Zeus! Not I," I said.

"Well, by calling anyone 'happy,' don't you mean they possess good and beautiful things?"

"Certainly."

"What about Love? You agreed he needs good and beautiful things, and that's why he desires them—because he needs them."

202D

65. Agathon had maintained this at 195A5.

"I certainly did."⁶⁶

"Then how could he be a god if he has no share in good and beautiful things?"

"There's no way he could, apparently."

"Now do you see? You don't believe Love is a god either!"

"Then, what could Love be?" I asked. "A mortal?"

"Certainly not."

"Then, what is he?"

"He's like what we mentioned before," she said. "He is in between mortal and immortal."

"What do you mean, Diotima?"

"He's a great spirit, Socrates. Everything spiritual, you see, is in between god and mortal."⁶⁷

"What is their function?" I asked.

"They are messengers who shuttle back and forth between the two, conveying prayer and sacrifice from men to gods, while to men they bring commands from the gods and gifts in return for sacrifices. Being in the middle of the two, they round out the whole and bind fast the all to all.⁶⁸ Through them all divination passes, through them the art of priests in sacrifice and ritual, in enchantment, prophecy, and sorcery. Gods do not mix with men; they mingle and converse with us through spirits instead, whether we are awake or asleep. He who is wise in any of these ways is a man of the spirit, but he who is wise in any other way, in a profession or any manual work, is merely a mechanic. These spirits are many and various, then, and one of them is Love."

"Who are his father and mother?" I asked.

"That's rather a long story," she said. "I'll tell it to you, all the same."

203B

66. Agathon agreed to this at 201AB.

67. The generic word for the spiritual, *daimonion*, is the same as that used for the spirit that is said to warn Socrates when he is about to do wrong (e.g., *Apology* 31C).

68. Cf. Aristophanes' speech, esp. 191D.

same day. Because he is his father's son, however, he keeps coming back to life, but then anything he finds his way to always slips away, and for this reason Love is never completely without resources, nor is he ever rich.

"He is in between wisdom and ignorance as well. In fact, you see, none of the gods loves wisdom or wants to become wise—for they are wise—and no one else who is wise already loves wisdom; on the other hand, no one who is ignorant will love wisdom either or want to become wise. For what's especially difficult about being ignorant is that you are content with yourself, even though you're neither beautiful and good nor intelligent. If you don't think you need anything, of course you won't want what you don't think you need."

"In that case, Diotima, who are the people who love wisdom, if they are neither wise nor ignorant?"

"That's obvious," she said. "A child could tell you. Those who love wisdom fall in between those two extremes. And Love is one of them, because he is in love with what is beautiful, and wisdom is extremely beautiful. It follows that Love must be a lover of wisdom—and, as such, is in between being wise and being ignorant. This, too, comes to him from his parentage, from a father who is wise and resourceful and a mother who is not wise and lacks resource.

"My dear Socrates, that, then, is the nature of the Spirit called Love. Considering what you thought about Love, it's no surprise that you were led into thinking of Love as you did. On the basis of what you say, I conclude that you thought Love was being loved, rather than being a lover. I think that's why Love struck you as beautiful in every way, because it is what is really beautiful and graceful that deserves to be loved,⁷² and this is perfect and highly blessed; but being a lover takes a different form, which I have just described."

So I said, "All right then, my friend. What you say about Love is beautiful, but if you're right, what use is Love to human beings?"

THE SPEECH OF DIOTIMA

WHEN APHRODITE WAS BORN, the gods held a celebration. Poros,⁶⁹ the son of Metis, was there among them. When they had feasted, Penia⁷⁰ came begging, as poverty does when there's a party, and stayed by the gates. Now Poros got drunk on nectar (there was no wine yet, you see) and, feeling drowsy, went into the garden of Zeus, where he fell asleep. Then Penia schemed up a plan to relieve her lack of resources: she would get a child from Poros. So she lay beside him and got pregnant with Love. That is why Love was born to follow Aphrodite and serve her: because he was conceived on the day of her birth. And that's why he is also by nature a lover of beauty, because Aphrodite herself is especially beautiful.

"As the son of Poros and Penia, his lot in life is set to be like theirs. In the first place, he is always poor, and he's far from being delicate and beautiful (as ordinary people think he is); instead, he is tough and shriveled and shoeless and homeless, always lying on the dirt without a bed, sleeping at people's doorsteps and in roadsides under the sky, having his mother's nature, always living with Need. But on his father's side he is a schemer after the beautiful and the good; he is brave, impetuous, and intense, an awesome hunter, always weaving snares, resourceful in his pursuit of intelligence, a lover of wisdom⁷¹ through all his life, a genius with enchantments, potions, and clever pleadings.

"He is by nature neither immortal nor mortal. But now he springs to life when he gets his way; now he dies—all in the very

69. Poros means "way," "resource." His mother's name, *Mētis*, means "cunning."

70. "Poverty."

71. "Lover of wisdom" (*philosophōn*): one who pursues philosophy.

204A

204B

204C

204D

72. "What deserves to be loved": the argument turns on an ambiguity in the Greek between "being loved" and "lovable," both of which are involved in the sense of *eranōn*.

203C

203D

203E

"I'll try to teach you that, Socrates, after I finish this. So far I've been explaining the character and the parentage of Love. Now, according to you,⁷³ he is love for beautiful things. But suppose someone asks us, 'Socrates and Diotima, what is the point of loving beautiful things?'"

"It's clearer this way: 'The lover of beautiful things has a desire; what does he desire?'"

"That they become his own," I said.

"But that answer calls for still another question, that is, 'What will this man have, when the beautiful things he wants have become his own?'"

I said there was no way I could give a ready answer to that question.

204E

Then she said, "Suppose someone changes the question, putting 'good' in place of 'beautiful,' and asks you this: 'Tell me, Socrates, a lover of good things has a desire; what does he desire?'"

"That they become his own," I said.

"And what will he have, when the good things he wants have become his own?"

"This time it's easier to come up with the answer," I said. "He'll have happiness."⁷⁴

205A

"That's what makes happy people happy, isn't it—possessing good things. There's no need to ask further, 'What's the point of wanting happiness?' The answer you gave seems to be final."

"True," I said.

"Now this desire for happiness, this kind of love—do you think it is common to all human beings and that everyone wants to have good things forever and ever? What would you say?"

"Just that," I said. "It is common to all."

"Then, Socrates, why don't we say that everyone is in love," she asked, "since everyone always loves the same things? In-

205B

stead, we say some people are in love and others not; why is that?"

"I wonder about that myself," I said.

"It's nothing to wonder about," she said. "It's because we divide out a special kind of love, and we refer to it by the word that means the whole—'love'; and for the other kinds of love we use other words."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Well, you know, for example, that 'poetry' has a very wide range, when it is used to mean 'creativity.'⁷⁵ After all, everything that is responsible for creating something out of nothing is a kind of poetry; and so all the creations of every craft and profession are themselves a kind of poetry, and everyone who practices a craft is a poet."

205C

"True."

"Nevertheless," she said, "as you also know, these craftsmen are not called poets. We have other words for them, and out of the whole of poetry we have marked off one part, the part the Muses give us with melody and rhythm, and we refer to this by the word that means the whole. For this alone is called 'poetry,' and those who practice this part of poetry are called poets."

"True."

205D



"That's also how it is with love. The main point is this: every desire for good things or for happiness is 'the supreme and treacherous love'⁷⁶ in everyone. But those who pursue this along any of its many other ways—through making money, or through the love of sports, or through philosophy—we don't say that these people are in love, and we don't call them lovers. It's only when people are devoted exclusively to one special kind of love that we use these words that really belong to the whole of it: 'love' and 'in love' and 'lovers.'"

75. "Poetry" translates *poiēsis*, which means any kind of production or creation. Greeks used the word *poiētēs*, however, mainly for poets—for writers of metrical verses that were actually set to music.

76. This appears to be a tag line of poetry, as the language is poetic. The source is unknown.

73. See 202D.

74. Happiness: *eudaimonia*. No English word catches the full range of this term, which is used for the whole of well-being and the good life.

"I am beginning to see your point," I said.

"Now there is a certain story," she said, "according to which lovers are those people who seek their other halves."⁷⁷ But according to my story, a lover does not seek the half or the whole, unless, my friend, it turns out to be good as well. I say this because people are even willing to cut off their own arms and legs if they think they are diseased. I don't think an individual takes joy in what belongs to him personally unless by 'belonging to me' he means 'good' and by 'belonging to another' he means 'bad.' That's because what everyone loves is really nothing other than the good. Do you disagree?"

206A

"Zeus! Not I," I said.

"Now, then," she said. "Can we simply say that people love the good?"

"Yes," I said.

"But shouldn't we add that, in loving it, they want the good to be theirs?"

"We should."

"And not only that," she said. "They want the good to be theirs forever, don't they?"

"We should add that too."

"In a word, then, love is wanting to possess the good forever."

"That's very true," I said.

"This, then, is the object of love,"⁷⁸ she said. "In view of that, how do people pursue it if they are truly in love? What do they do with the eagerness and zeal we call love? What is the real purpose of love? Can you say?"

"If I could," I said, "I wouldn't be your student, filled with admiration for your wisdom, and trying to learn these very things."

77. This was the point of Aristophanes' speech. Diotima's reference to that speech makes it hard to believe that Socrates is reporting a conversation he actually had with a woman named Diotima and lends credence to the hypothesis that Diotima is a character Socrates dreamed up for this occasion.

78. "The object of love": here we translate Bast's emendation from *τοῦτο* in the *miss* to *τοῦτον*. In this we follow Bury; cf. Vlastos ("The Individual as Object of Love in Plato," p. 21, n. 57).

"Well, I'll tell you," she said. "It is giving birth in beauty,⁷⁹ whether in body or in soul."

"It would take divination to figure out what you mean. I can't."

206C

"Well, I'll tell you more clearly," she said. "All of us are pregnant, Socrates, both in body and in soul, and, as soon as we come to a certain age, we naturally desire to give birth. Now no one can possibly give birth in anything ugly; only in something beautiful. That's because when a man and a woman come together in order to give birth, this is a godly affair. Pregnancy, reproduction—this is an immortal thing for a mortal animal to do, and it cannot occur in anything that is out of harmony, but ugliness is out of harmony with all that is godly. Beauty, however, is in harmony with the divine. Therefore the goddess who presides at childbirth—she's called Moira or Eileithuia—is really Beauty.⁸⁰ That's why, whenever pregnant animals or persons draw near to beauty, they become gentle and joyfully disposed and give birth and reproduce; but near ugliness they are frowning and draw back in pain; they turn away and shrink back and do not reproduce, and because they hold on to what they carry inside them, the labor is painful. This is the source of the great excitement about beauty that comes to anyone who is pregnant and already teeming with life: beauty releases them from their great pain. You see, Socrates," she said, "what Love wants is not beauty, as you think it is."⁸¹

206E

"Well, what is it, then?"

"Reproduction and birth in beauty."

79. "Birth in beauty" (*tokos en kalōi*): The preposition Diotima uses is ambiguous between "in" and "in the presence of." She may mean that the pregnant person causes the newborn (which may be an idea) to be within a beautiful person; or she may mean that the pregnant person simply is stimulated to give birth in the presence of a beautiful person. (On Aristophanes' more comic use of the notion of Interior Reproduction, see 191C.)

80. Moira or Eileithuia: Moira, whose name means "the Dispenser" as Bury translates it, is known mainly as a Fate, but she is also a birth goddess in Homer (*Iliad*, xxiv.209). The identification with the birth goddess Eileithuia is made in Pindar (*Olympian Odes* vi.41, *Nemean Odes* vii.).

81. See 201E, 204D3.

"Maybe," I said.

"Certainly," she said. "Now, why reproduction? It's because reproduction goes on forever; it is what mortals have in place of immortality. A lover must desire immortality along with the good, if what we agreed earlier was right, that Love wants to possess the good forever.⁸² It follows from our argument that Love must desire immortality."

207A

All this she taught me, on those occasions when she spoke on the art of love.⁸³ And once she asked, "What do you think causes love and desire, Socrates? Don't you see what an awful state a wild animal is in when it wants to reproduce? Footed and winged animals alike, all are plagued by the disease of Love. First they are sick for intercourse with each other, then for nurturing their young—for their sake the weakest animals stand ready to do battle against the strongest and even to die for them, and they may be racked with famine in order to feed their young. They would do anything for their sake. Human beings, you'd think, would do this because they understand the reason for it; but what causes wild animals to be in such a state of love? Can you say?"

207C

And I said again that I didn't know.

So she said, "How do you think you'll ever master the art of love, if you don't know that?"

"But that's why I came to you, Diotima, as I just said. I knew I needed a teacher. So tell me what causes this, and everything else that belongs to the art of love."

"If you really believe that Love by its nature aims at what we have often agreed it does, then don't be surprised at the answer," she said. "For among animals the principle is the same as with us, and mortal nature seeks so far as possible to live forever and be immortal. And this is possible in one way only: by reproduction, because it always leaves behind a new young one in place of the old. Even while each living thing is said to be alive and to be the same—as a person is said to be the same from childhood till

207D

82. 206A9-13.

83. "The art of love": *ta erōtika*. See 177D8, with our note on the expression.

he turns into an old man—even then he never consists of the same things, though he is called the same, but he is always being renewed and in other respects passing away, in his hair and flesh and bones and blood and his entire body. And it's not just in his body, but in his soul too, for none of his manners, customs, opinions, desires, pleasures, pains, or fears ever remains the same, but some are coming to be in him while others are passing away. And what is still far stranger than that is that not only does one branch of knowledge come to be in us while another passes away and that we are never the same even in respect of our knowledge, but that each single piece of knowledge has the same fate. For what we call *studying* exists because knowledge is leaving us, because forgetting is the departure of knowledge, while studying puts back a fresh memory in place of what went away, thereby preserving a piece of knowledge, so that it seems to be the same. And in that way everything mortal is preserved, not, like the divine, by always being the same in every way, but because what is departing and aging leaves behind something new, something such as it had been. By this device, Socrates," she said, "what is mortal shares in immortality, whether it is a body or anything else, while the immortal has another way. So don't be surprised if everything naturally values its own offspring, because it is for the sake of immortality that everything shows this zeal, which is Love."

208B

Yet when I heard her speech I was amazed, and spoke: "Well," said I, "Most wise Diotima, is this really the way it is?"

208C

And in the manner of a perfect sophist she said, "Be sure of it, Socrates. Look, if you will, at how human beings seek honor. You'd be amazed at their irrationality, if you didn't have in mind what I spoke about and if you hadn't pondered the awful state of love they're in, wanting to become famous and 'to lay up glory immortal forever,'⁸⁴ and how they're ready to brave any danger for the sake of this, much more than they are for their children, and they are prepared to spend money, suffer through all sorts of ordeals, and even die for the sake of glory. Do you really think that Alcestis would have died for Admetus," she asked, "or that Achilles would have died after Patroclus, or that your Kodros

208D

84. A line of poetry of unknown origin.

engage; and so he tries to educate him. In my view, you see, when he makes contact with someone beautiful and keeps company with him, he conceives and gives birth to what he has been carrying inside him for ages. And whether they are together or apart, he remembers that beauty. And in common with him he nurtures the newborn; such people, therefore, have much more to share than do the parents of human children, and have a firmer bond of friendship, because the children in whom they have a share are more beautiful and more immortal. Everyone would rather have such children than human ones, and would look up to Homer, Hesiod, and the other good poets with envy and admiration for the offspring they have left behind—offspring, which, because they are immortal themselves, provide their parents with immortal glory and remembrance. For example," she said, "those are the sort of children Lycourgos⁸⁹ left behind in Sparta as the saviors of Sparta and virtually all of Greece. Among you the honor goes to Solon for his creation of your laws. Other men in other places everywhere, Greek or barbarian, have brought a host of beautiful deeds into the light and begotten every kind of virtue. Already many shrines have sprung up to honor them for their immortal children, which hasn't happened yet to anyone for human offspring.

"Even you, Socrates, could probably come to be initiated into these rites of love. But as for the purpose of these rites when they are done correctly—that is the final and highest mystery, and I don't know if you are capable of it. I myself will tell you," she said, "and I won't stint any effort. And you must try to follow if you can.

"A lover who goes about this matter correctly must begin in his youth to devote himself to beautiful bodies. First, if the leader⁹⁰ leads aright, he should love one body and beget beautiful ideas there; then he should realize that the beauty of any one body is brother to the beauty of any other and that if he is to pursue beauty of form he'd be very foolish not to think that the

89. Lycourgos was supposed to have been the founder of the oligarchic laws and stern customs of Lacedaimon (Sparta). Socrates' admiration for these cannot have been popular in democratic Athens.

90. The leader: Love.

would have died so as to preserve the throne for his sons,⁸⁵ if they hadn't expected the memory of their virtue—which we still hold in honor—to be immortal?⁸⁶ Far from it," she said. "I believe that anyone will do anything for the sake of immortal virtue and the glorious fame that follows; and the better the people, the more they will do, for they are all in love with immortality.

"Now, some people are pregnant in body, and for this reason turn more to women and pursue love in that way, providing themselves through childbirth with immortality and remembrance and happiness, as they think, for all time to come; while others are pregnant in soul—because there surely *are* those who are even more pregnant in their souls than in their bodies, and these are pregnant with what is fitting for a soul to bear and bring to birth. And what is fitting? Wisdom and the rest of virtue, which all poets beget, as well as all the craftsmen who are said to be creative. But by far the greatest and most beautiful part of wisdom deals with the proper ordering of cities and households, and that is called moderation and justice.⁸⁷

When someone has been pregnant with these in his soul from early youth, while he is still a virgin, and, having arrived at the proper age, desires to beget and give birth, he too will certainly go about seeking the beauty in which he would beget; for he will never beget in anything ugly. Since he is pregnant, then, he is much more drawn to bodies that are beautiful than to those that are ugly; and if he also has the luck to find a soul that is beautiful and noble and well-formed, he is even more drawn to this combination; such a man makes him instantly teem with ideas and arguments⁸⁸ about virtue—the qualities a virtuous man should have and the customary activities in which he should

85. Kodros was the legendary last king of Athens. He gave his life to satisfy a prophecy that promised victory to Athens and salvation from the invading Dorians if their king was killed by the enemy.

86. Compare Diotima's account of self-sacrifice with Phaedrus' speech at 179B ff, where the love in question is more personal.

87. The allusion here is to the art of politics as it is described in the conversation between Protagoras and Socrates in the *Protagoras*.

88. "Ideas and arguments": *logoi*. *Logos* has more meanings than can be captured by any single English word.

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209B

209C

beauty of all bodies is one and the same. When he grasps this, he must become a lover of all beautiful bodies, and he must think that this wild gaping after just one body is a small thing and despise it.

"After this he must think that the beauty of people's souls is more valuable than the beauty of their bodies, so that if someone is decent in his soul, even though he is scarcely blooming in his body, our lover must be content to love and care for him and to seek to give birth to such ideas as will make young men better. The result is that our lover will be forced to gaze at the beauty of activities and laws and to see that all this is akin to itself, with the result that he will think that the beauty of bodies is a thing of no importance. After customs he must move on to various kinds of knowledge. The result is that he will see the beauty of knowledge and be looking mainly not at beauty in a single example—as a servant would who favored the beauty of a little boy or a man or a single custom (being a slave, of course, he's low and small-minded)—but the lover is turned to the great sea of beauty, and, gazing upon this, he gives birth to many gloriously beautiful ideas and theories, in unstinting love of wisdom,⁹¹ until, having grown and been strengthened there, he catches sight of such knowledge, and it is the knowledge of such beauty . . .

"Try to pay attention to me," she said, "as best you can. You see, the man who has been thus far guided in matters of Love, who has beheld beautiful things in the right order and correctly, is coming now to the goal of Loving: all of a sudden he will catch sight of something wonderfully beautiful in its nature; that, Socrates, is the reason for all his earlier labors:

"First, it always is and neither comes to be nor passes away, neither waxes nor wanes. Second, it is not beautiful this way and ugly that way, nor beautiful at one time and ugly at another, nor beautiful in relation to one thing and ugly in relation to another; nor is it beautiful here but ugly there, as it would be if it were beautiful for some people and ugly for others.⁹² Nor will the

91. "Love of wisdom": *philosophia*.

92. "As it would be if it were beautiful for some people and ugly for others": Bury rejects this as an inept gloss, following Voegelin. It is accepted, however, by Burnet, Dover, and most other editors.

beautiful appear to him in the guise of a face or hands or anything else that belongs to the body. It will not appear to him as one idea or one kind of knowledge. It is not anywhere in another thing, as in an animal, or in earth, or in heaven, or in anything else, but itself by itself with itself; it is always one in form; and all the other beautiful things share in that, in such a way that when those others come to be or pass away, this does not become the least bit smaller or greater nor suffer any change. So when someone rises by these stages, through loving boys correctly, and begins to see this beauty, he has almost grasped his goal. This is what it is to go aright, or be lead by another, into the mystery of Love: one goes always upwards for the sake of this Beauty, starting out from beautiful things and using them like rising stairs: from one body to two and from two to all beautiful bodies, then from beautiful bodies to beautiful customs, and from customs to learning beautiful things, and from these lessons he arrives⁹³ in the end at this lesson, which is learning of this very Beauty, so that in the end he comes to know just what it is to be beautiful.

"And there in life, Socrates, my friend," said the woman from Mantinea, "there if anywhere should a person live his life, beholding that Beauty. If you once see that, it won't occur to you to measure beauty by gold or clothing or beautiful boys and youths—who, if you see them now, strike you out of your senses, and make you, you and many others, eager to be with the boys you love and look at them forever, if there were any way to do that, forgetting food and drink, everything but looking at them and being with them. But how would it be, in our view," she said, "if someone got to see the Beautiful itself, absolute, pure, unmixed, not polluted by human flesh or colors or any other great nonsense of mortality, but if he could see the divine Beauty itself in its one form? Do you think it would be a poor life for a human being to look there and to behold it by that which he ought,⁹⁴ and to be with it? Or haven't you remembered," she said, "that in that life alone, when he looks at Beauty in the only

93. Here we follow the manuscripts, rejecting Usener's emendation. The finite verb form of the manuscripts is more vivid.

94. ". . . which he ought": apparently, by the mind's eye.

way that Beauty can be seen—only then will it become possible for him to give birth not to images of virtue (because he's in touch with no images), but to true virtue (because he is in touch with the true Beauty). The love of the gods belongs to anyone who has given birth to true virtue and nourished it, and if any human being could become immortal, it would be he."

212B

This, Phaedrus and the rest of you, was what Diotima told me. I was persuaded. And once persuaded, I try to persuade others too that human nature can find no better workmate for acquiring this than Love. That's why I say that every man must honor Love, why I honor the rites of Love myself and practice them with special diligence, and why I commend them to others. Now and always I praise the power and courage of Love so far as I am able. Consider this speech, then, Phaedrus, if you wish, a speech in praise of Love. Or if not, call it whatever and however you please to call it.

212C