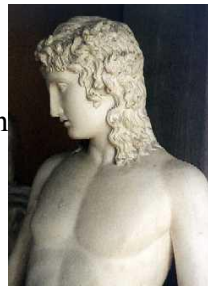


This dialogue is unlike the others of Plato, in as much as , Socrates does not question the others in the dialectical fashion, except briefly. Instead the various speakers take turns, as it were, each offering what he knows from his own perspective and then Socrates presents a view that can place the others within a grander scheme. At least one commentator has speculated that Plato wrote this dialogue as a form of brochure for his Academy in Athens. It gives a sampling of what it might be like to attend a class at the Academy. Leading thinkers each present what they know from their own perspective or discipline and then Plato would enter the discussion with dialectical questioning and attempt a synthesis.

The banquet did occur. Xenophon reports on it as well as Plato. Agathon had won first prize for dramatic play. Guests were invited back to the house for a party. Socrates was one of them. There at the party, instead of becoming drunk and entering into orgiastic practices, they decided to each take turn speaking about love. (Today when males gather at drinking parties the most popular topics are often sex or sports.)

When you read the dialogue you should note that when Socrates turn to speak comes, after questioning Agathon, he tells of his instruction as to the nature of Love and Beauty from a woman, Diotima. Pay particular attention to her instructions. She provides a lesson that reveals Plato's idea of the Eternal and Ideal Forms. In this dialogue Plato is giving a credit or reference to Socrates and to Diotima as the source of his ideas.

A statue of Eros possibly done by a Roman artist Praxiteles



1) The Dialogue Symposium Written 360 B.C.E Translated by Benjamin Jowett _Older translation by Benjamin Jowett

READ ALONG version at youtube 2:15:16

2) Overview of The Symposium of Plato A Platonic Dialogue by Katherine Stabile Modified by Philip A. Pecorino

Apollodorus relates to a friend the events and speeches which were reported to him by Aristodemus.

Characters of the Dialogue:

HOST: Agathon - tragic poet who gives the party.

GUESTS

Phaedrus- humanist scholar

Pausanias- sophist

Euryximachus -physician

Aristophanes –comic playwright

Socrates- philosopher

PARTY CRASHER

Alcibiades – soldier of fortune - crashes the party.

SPEECHES

PHAEDRUS: LOVE is the oldest of all gods, the benefactor of humankind, the inspiration of honor (a man would rather die than appear as a coward in the eyes of his beloved) and the spirit of self-sacrifice.

PAUSANIAS: His approach is more subtle. He introduces the distinction between the celestial love and the market love. Base love's object: women and young boys; Noble love's object; Young men. His speech is a justification, a hymn of homosexuality. He is offering practical advice and street wise type of knowledge.

EURYXIMACHUS: His is a professional, mechanical, chlorophorm-smelling definition of love. His method is to exalt the distinction of bad and good love (balance and harmony)

into a cosmic principle and ergo universally applicable. This definition functions as the transition from the narrow definition of love as physical desire (Phaedrus and Pausanias) to the intellectual love in Diotima's speech. As a physician he speaks of the healthy and the ill and advises from a foundation of practice.

ARISTOPHANES: As a comedian he composes a humorous tale to frame his account of love. He defines love as the "desire and pursuit of the whole. He recognizes that: a) love is a need whose satisfaction is more than physical; b) love is a longing to regain a lost happiness.

AGATHON: hymn to the "essential" nature of love. Superficial rhetoric. His contribution is the admission that love's object is Beauty He too is a humanist scholar. Yet, much of his effort through quotations produces a contribution which contradicts that of Phaedrus.

TRANSITION: Points established:

SOCRATES 1 Love is a relative name, like father and mother

AND 2. Love desires its object because it lacks it

AGATHON 3. Love desires the preservation of its object once it possesses it.

4. Since the object of love (as Agathon has pointed out)

is beauty, eros cannot be beautiful and since beauty

is the same as the Good he cannot be good either. This

conclusion is not mere word play. Love is established as the

consciousness of a need for a good not yet acquired or possessed.

SOCRATES . He relates what Diotima has told him.

Presuppositions of the speech: Theory of the forms and the concept of the Immortality of the soul.

Eros is neither beautiful nor ugly, neither good nor evil. He is an intermediate state, a daemon, half man, half god; he is like opinion (Intermediate between ignorance and episteme. Love is a link, a daemon. He is the true lover of wisdom because wisdom is beautiful and beauty is the object of love. Men are lovers of the good which they want to possess perpetually. Perpetuity achieved through procreation Thus, Eros is procreation: physical, spiritual and philosophical (that of wisdom)

Painting of Eros and Psyche >>>



The Good or Beauty

Beauty of Soul and Body

		Lover of wisdom;
Physical Beauty	This love brings the	True immortality
Sexual love	spiritual off springs	of the soul through the
Physical marriage	(civilization and	possession of Forms.
For the basest desires in	society) into existence	(Lovers of Zeus)
Human nature	Marriage of Noble Minds.	
It feeds the animal in man.	(Lovers of Ares)	
(Lovers of the Vulgar)		.

Phaedrus, in customary fashion, begins his encomium to Eros, the god of Love, by explicating the prominence of his birth. Phaedrus eulogizes to a great extent, seeing that Eros is widely acknowledged as the eldest of gods (which is made evident by Hesiod and

Parmenides). Only Chaos precedes him in maturity. Phaedrus suggests that by reason of Eros' seniority, he bestows the greatest rewards to man. To his fellow partakers of intellectual revelry, Phaedrus reveals the great benefits granted to mankind by Eros. The primary gift to man is the instillation of honor. A lover's principal intention is to give the impression of dignity and nobility to his beloved, which in essence, is distinguished as beauty. Love provokes one to live nobly as it teaches man honor and pride wherein he will attain goodness through his respectable actions. Hence, if a lover were to perpetrate appalling and dishonorable deeds and if his disgrace be learned of by his beloved, he would recognize the ugliness of humiliation and shame. Shame consequently propels the lover to do great and noble needs.

"And I say that a lover who is detected in doing any dishonorable act, or submitting in cowardice when any dishonor is done to him by another, will be more pained at being detected by his beloved than at being seen by his father, or by his companions, or by anyone else," (Symposium).

Phaedrus also suggests that Eros implants the moral fiber of self-sacrifice into man. Thus, an army exclusively comprised of lovers and loved ones who are ashamed to display any signs of spinelessness would be indestructible, as they would more readily die than disgrace themselves in the presence of each other. Phaedrus further praises the honored men and women (Alcestis, Achilles) who have died for love and informs his companions that the gods reward them as well.

PAUSANIAS

Pausanias indicates that Aphrodite, goddess of Love, exists in two antithetical forms: Heavenly Aphrodite (Ouranios), and Popular Aphrodite (Pandemos). Thus, he infers that Eros, as her progeny, is of two divergent sorts and that he must distinguish between them. Pausanias erroneously construes Popular Eros is vile since it randomly targets women and young boys for bodily pleasure, both of whom are devoid of any intellectual capacity. Heavenly Eros is favored because its devotees are firm in their quest for virtue, or teaching it to their beloved burgeoning thinkers.

“Those who are inspired by this love turn to the male, and delight in him who is the more valiant and intelligent nature; and anyone may recognize the pure enthusiasts in the very character of their attachments. For they love not boys, but intelligent beings whose reason is beginning to be developed, much about the time at which their beards begin to grow,” (Symposium).

Love’s significance emerges purely with respect to virtuous attainment. Lovers ought to enhance or perfect their intellectually immature beloved whilst this beloved must be subject to acquire wisdom from their lovers. In recognition of the virtue they attain from their ripened mastermind lovers, these youngsters must sexually “make their day”, presumably succumbing themselves to anal copulation. Thus he promotes sexual pleasure provided that virtue is the force behind it.

ERYXIMACHUS

Eryximachus, the snobbish doctor who assumes responsibility over the party, uses his medical proficiency to manipulate his eulogy of Love. He extends Eros beyond sexual desire asserting that it encompasses all life, not only humans. He claims that the physician employs medicine, the knowledge of desire, and strives to satiate the healthy components of the body while it denies the sickly, damaging parts of any gratification that constitute Bad Eros. Thus the conflicting elements of the body, reminiscent of hot and cold, will be acquiescent.

“There are in the human body these two kinds of love, which are confessedly different and unlike, and being unlike, they have loves and desires which are unlike; and the desire of the healthy is one, and the desire of the diseased another...the good and healthy elements [in the body] are to be indulged, and the bad elements and the elements of disease are not to be indulged, but discouraged,” (Symposium)

Medicine, just like music, generates harmony between divergent elements (notes). The instant that concord among the bodily elements is achieved, the body is in attunement. This attunement is the product of Love. Eryximachus maintains that stability must govern over

incongruent elements if there is to be Love, subsequently exemplifying the omnipotence of order.

ARISTOPHANES

Aristophanes, the comic poet, reckons that Eros is a distinct uplifting force and presents a pleasant and genial allegory in describing human nature and its condition with the suggestion that Love helps us to unearth our other half and that one day we may be wholly reunited. Our primordial nature was of another kind where three genders pervaded the earth: male, female, and hermaphrodite. They were exceptionally physically potent and were extreme zealots who were blasphemous toward the gods, but Zeus did not annihilate their race. Instead of renouncing the sacrifices put forward by them, he enfeebled them by hacking them in two. The androgynous halves, one man and the other woman, were blessed with interlocking genitals that were capable of procreation. The male halves both were stumped with protruding genitals, but Zeus managed to allot another crevice on the body so that they, too, may satiate their lust, and then go on about their business. Apparently, the lesbians, or female halves, were done for; their enjoyment was overlooked. The two halves of each whole were gorged with longing as they pined for one another. Once they embraced, they basked in each other as they sought everlasting union. So Aristophanes effectively concludes that Eros is the name for desire and pursuit of wholeness motivated to mend the severance of humankind.

"I believe that if our loves were perfectly accomplished, and each one returning to its primeval nature had his original true love, then our race would be happy. And if this would be best of all, the best in the next degree and under present circumstances must be the nearest approach to such a union; and that will be the attainment of a congenial love," (Symposium).

Frequently asked questions on the symposium: What is the story of the split humans ***The Butcher's Wife and the "split men"***

AGATHON

Agathon, a tragic poet renowned for his loveliness, is the beloved of Pausanias. In his tribute to Eros, he is distinct from the other speakers in that he first will praise Eros' nature and after will praise his contributions to man. Unlike Phaedrus' encomium, Agathon indicates Eros' supreme beauty greater than all the deities, and accordingly is the most youthful in their company. Eros, he says, has contempt for old age and shuns it. He ascribes many good attributes to Eros; for Agathon professes he is soft, fair, just, temperate, courageous, wise, poetic, artistic, peaceful, and orderly. Agathon deviously goes into raptures over his own gorgeousness in this encomium because he, in fact, is an exceedingly beautiful man. Moreover, suggests that after the nativity of Love, that goodness was dispersed throughout the world. Agathon says,

"In the days of old, as I began saying, dreadful deeds were done among the gods, for they were ruled by Necessity; but now since the birth of Love, and from the love of the beautiful, has spring every good in heaven and earth," (Symposium).

The gifts of Eros to humanity comprised of concord (omonoia...my name), tenderness, benevolence, empathy, civility, desire of beauty and constancy.

DIOTIMA

Diotima convinces Socrates that Love is not a divinity because it lacks good and beautiful qualities that a god is believed to possess. Socrates deduces that this ought to signify Love's mortality. On the contrary, Love is neither mortal nor divine, explains Diotima, but rather an intermediary spirit called a daemon. As Eros longs to perpetually possess good things, he uses beauty as the object of his desire so that he may do so. Unceasing possession of the good will be upheld through desire to procreate. Procreation accordingly substantiates Love's desire for immortality. Furthermore, Diotima explains that as beauty is sought through procreation, there are assorted levels of beauty. Diotima states,

"He who from these ascending under the influence of true love, begins to perceive that beauty, is not far from the end. And the true order of going, or being led by another, to the things of love, is to begin from the beauties of earth and mount upwards for the sake of that other beauty, using these as steps only, and from one going on to two, and from two to all fair forms to fair practices, and from fair practices to fair notions, until from fair notions he

arrives at the notion of absolute beauty, and at last knows what the essence of beauty is,”
(*Symposium*).

This quote, in essence, is the advertisement of Plato's Theory of the Forms. The escalation of the lover to the absolute form of beauty, Beauty, begins with physical beauty as the object of desire in the first level of ascent. Diotima reveals that a young boy initially may be provoked to procreate through a sexual and physical attraction to one individual body. This body functions as a distorted image of real beauty as it coincides with Plato's first stage in his Theory of the Forms. The youth then becomes conscious of the actuality that the beauty of one body is of the same substance of another. Understanding that visible beauty is shared by all bodies, he sees the preposterousness of loving a single distinct body. The lover now ascends to a higher level, since he is disjoined from the specificity of the visible world. Subsequently, the youth acquires knowledge of the beauty of laws and institutions in his new realm of intelligence. As he grows to love the knowledge of one specific practice, he will come to love all knowledge in its entirety. He is on the brink of grasping Beauty in its purest and most everlasting form. It is this form of beauty that the true philosopher beholds for it is the universal essence for everything that exists in the realm of beauty. The beauties of the lower levels partake in Beauty as they are derived from this source. This final level is when the lover may unveil his eyes and catch sight of something of an unpolluted brilliant magnificence, Beauty.

ALCIBIADES

Alcibiades is the flamboyant party crasher of this convention of love, and is severely smashed upon his entrance. His intoxication allows him to overtly and skillfully articulate his unrequited love affair with Socrates to the guests. Ultimately, Alcibiades' love for Socrates is akin to that of the Pausanian beloved for he desires to extract wisdom from him with the intention of ripening virtuously into manhood, although he initially had only a physical fixation. A fabrication rests in Alcibiades' pursuit for wisdom. His tribute to Socrates sounds more like a conviction of his hubris in that Socrates is not allured by Alcibiades sex appeal. In equating him with Marsyas, a satyr whipped alive for his hubris by Apollo, Alcibiades, in effect, deprecates him out of his own exasperation. Even so, the lover's role does not befit Socrates in a sense that he is not lured by physical

beauty. Socrates' love for Alcibiades, on the contrary, is analogous to Platonic Love, that is inherent in the speech of Diotima. Alcibiades clearly portrays himself as a lover scorned by Socrates. But Socrates is in fact the true lover, who loves what is truly beautiful and good, the proper object of love, instead of what only seems so. Real love seeks contemplation of Beauty, not sexual intercourse. Socrates rebukes Alcibiades' advances and entreaties indicating that he would not trade off his valuable good judgment and the virtue of his soul for some brief erotic pleasure. Socrates would not destroy that which attracted Alcibiades, his virtue. Socrates says,

"...truly you must see in me some rare beauty of a kind infinitely higher than any which I see in you. And therefore, if you mean to share with me and to exchange beauty for beauty, you will have greatly the advantage of me; you will gain true beauty in return for appearance—like Diomedes, gold in exchange for brass," (Symposium).

After several failed attempts at seduction, Alcibiades comes to realize that he will not succeed and it is the virtue of Socrates that rebukes him. He comes to respect Socrates' temperance. Alcibiades lust for Socrates and his false claims of a desire to acquire wisdom are illustrations of the type of love described by Pausanias. Alcibiades may appear to have platonically loved Socrates, but it is more certain that Socrates truly loved in this manner of which he spoke he learned from Diotima and is the very essence of platonic love.