

Love's Lack: The Relationship between Poverty and Eros in Plato's Symposium

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Recommended Citation

Lamascus, Lorelle D., "Love's Lack: The Relationship between Poverty and Eros in Plato's Symposium" (2010). *Dissertations (2009 -)*. Paper 71.
http://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations_mu/71

LOVE'S LACK: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POVERTY AND EROS IN
PLATO'S *SYMPOSIUM*

By

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,
Marquette University,
In partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Philosophy

Milwaukee, Wisconsin
December 2010

ABSTRACT
LOVE'S LACK: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN *EROS* AND POVERTY IN
PLATO'S SYMPOSIUM

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Marquette University, 2010

This dissertation responds to a long-standing debate among scholars regarding the nature of Platonic *Eros* and its relation to lack. The more prominent account of Platonic *Eros* presents the lack of *Eros* as a deficiency or need experienced by the lover with respect to the object needed, lacked, or desired, so that the nature of *Eros* is construed as self-interested or acquisitive, subsisting only so long as the lover lacks the beloved object. This dissertation argues that such an interpretation neglects the different senses of lack present in the *Symposium* and presents an alternative interpretation of *Eros* based on the *Symposium's* presentation of *Eros* as the child of Poverty and Resource.

Chapter one examines the origin and development of the position that Platonic *Eros* is acquisitive or egocentric and the influence this has had on subsequent interpretations of Plato's thought. Chapter two argues that Diotima's theogony of *Eros* that presents him as a child of Poverty and Resource is central to understanding the account of *Eros* propounded in her discourse. Chapter three examines the development and refinement of the concepts of lack and poverty that are offered alongside those of *Eros* throughout Socrates' account of *Eros* in the *Symposium*. Chapters four and five discuss the relationship of these concepts of lack to the depiction of *Eros* as an intermediary and the ethical consequences of this relationship. Chapter six shows how the disposition of poverty serves as the source of the erotic ascent toward the vision of the beautiful itself. Chapter seven, drawing upon the analysis of previous chapters, argues that the reexamination of the role of poverty in the *Symposium* reveals that the account of *Eros* offered there describes a *katharsis* of the affective element in human beings, parallel to the *katharsis* of the rational element described in Plato's *Phaedo*. This *katharsis* involves the embrace of poverty as a way of living, loving, and knowing. Thus, the poverty of *Eros* does not indicate a lack that is egocentric or acquisitive, but describes a kind of asceticism or spiritual discipline that is requisite for the philosophical and moral life.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Lorelle D. Lamascus

There are many people to whom I owe thanks for their encouraging words and continued support throughout this endeavor. Among these are my sister, my parents, Kevin Gibson, Susanne Foster, James South, and Theresa Tobin. For his direction in the early stages of this project, I am indebted to Rev. John D. Jones, and for his guidance in the interpretation of Greek texts, I am indebted to Franco Trivigno. I extend my thanks to all here mentioned, to my committee, and to any I may have failed to mention here.

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Plato's treatment of Eros in the *Symposium* presents Eros as the child of Poverty (*πενία*) and Resource (*πόρος*), and this is central to understanding the nature of Eros. The more prominent interpretation of the *Symposium*'s account of Eros presents this poverty as a lack or need experienced by the lover with respect to the object needed, lacked, or desired, so that the nature of Eros is construed as self-interested or acquisitive, subsisting only so long as the lover lacks the beloved object.¹ This assessment of Eros, however, does not resonate with Plato's presentation of Eros in the *Symposium* or his other works in which Eros and reason are presented as properly in accord with one another. The moral life and the philosophical life alike depend on properly trained or directed Eros. Indeed, in the context of the *Symposium*, the philosopher and a mythical personification of Eros are portrayed as poor and homeless; what this poverty (*πενία*) expresses is an appropriate detachment from transient goods and an appropriate directing of Eros towards eternal and unchanging goods, participation in which is the end or goal of the moral and philosophical lives. The poverty of Eros does not indicate a lack that is egocentric or acquisitive, desiring to possess private goods for its own pleasure; rather the poverty of Eros describes a kind of asceticism or spiritual discipline that is requisite for the philosophical and moral life. As a way and not merely a lack, Eros becomes a certain disposition in the lover that leads the lover to the Good.

¹ Gregory Vlastos, "The Individual as Object of Love in Plato," in *Platonic Studies*, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973) 3-42; Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, translated by Philip Watson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953).

Chapter one discusses the major interpretations of Platonic Eros from the last century, and traces the origin and development of the position that Platonic *Eros* is acquisitive or egocentric and the influence this has had on subsequent interpretations of Plato's thought. Though there is a good amount of literature examining the nature of Eros, the relationship between poverty and Eros is not sufficiently taken into account in this literature. This is, in part, because little heed is paid to Diotima's mythological account of the parentage of Eros and the way this account affects the interpretation or meaning of the ladder of love she subsequently describes. Egocentric accounts of Eros fail to note that the attitude or disposition of properly directed Eros not only precludes a grasping desire to possess or dominate the beloved, but necessitates an attitude of poverty toward objects and persons that loves them in allowing them to be what they are. I argue that the examination of the role that poverty plays in the understanding of Eros will show that such an account is unsatisfactory. This chapter concludes by noting that the role of poverty is essential to a proper and complete understanding of Eros and that the understanding of the relationship between poverty and Eros provides the foundation for understanding that Eros is not merely or even primarily acquisitive and egocentric. Rather, this relationship shows that Eros is better understood as activity and disposition.

Chapter two examines the roles of theogony and myth in the *Symposium* as a whole in order to show that the theogonic account of Eros given by Diotima is crucial to understanding the account of Eros contained in her discourse. Based on the use of theogony and myth in the speeches throughout the *Symposium*, I argue that the theogony given by Diotima presents the nature of Eros in which she grounds her prescription for its proper use and work.

Chapter three examines the concepts of poverty and lack present in the *Symposium* and Platonic dialogues from the same period. From the beginning of Socrates' examination of Agathon until the end of Socrates' speech, the theme of lack emerges in various forms, and is manifest in three different Greek terms: ἔνδεια, πενία, and ἀφροσύνη. Socrates' speech, in its discussion of Eros, moves from treating its relation to ἔνδεια, to its relation to πενία, and finally presents it as φιλοσοφία ἀφροσύνης. I argue that these are three distinct concepts of lack present in Socrates' speech in the *Symposium*, and that the sense of lack develops and changes alongside that of Eros as the speech progresses. Of these three words that express the lack of Eros, πενία, or poverty, stands out as holding special significance for understanding the lack of Eros because of its presence in the myth of Eros's origins and because of its thematic presence in the dialogue as a whole. The evidence of the dialogue and evidence from the Greek tradition prior to and contemporary with Plato, e.g., as present in Hesiod, Xenophon, and Aristophanes, shows that the concept of πενία is associated with a disposition of moderation. This disposition is, I argue, fundamental to Plato's conception of Eros.

Chapter four examines the relationship between the lack of Eros and his intermediate nature. Proceeding from the articulation of Eros as involving lack, this chapter shows that the conception of Eros as deficient leads to the conceptions of Eros as intermediary, and as daimon. The initial discussion of lack leads to the exposition of Eros as necessarily relational, and further to Diotima's description of Eros as existing between various sets of opposites and thus as intermediate or μετὰξυ. It is this intermediate status that identifies Eros as a daimon and the human being who understands the daimonic as the daimonic man. There is a traceable development, then, of the

concept of the intermediate in Diotima's discourse, one that begins with the recognition of Eros's lack, and derives from this lack a structure of Eros that expresses its metaphysical reality and the human psychological experience of this reality. This chapter articulates this development and shows that the consequences of Eros's intermediacy are embodied in his portrayal as daimon, particularly in the manner in which he includes both *Πόρος* and *Πενία* in his nature.

Given that Eros is an intermediate, the question arises as to the consequences of this status for the relationship of Eros to virtue. Chapter five responds to this question by examining Diotima's remarks concerning the use (*χρεία*) and work (*ἔργον*) of Eros. I argue that we should understand 'use' not as an instrumental means to acquiring some object, but rather as the appropriate directing of an activity proper to an individual being toward its proper end. Eros has a proper use and a proper work, according to the kind of being to which he is joined. Eros, like the cosmos he inhabits, is subject to rational order, and, though Eros animates the cosmos and causes all beings to strive toward participation in immortality, he causes this striving in accordance with the proper end of each kind of being. Consequently, his proper use for human beings is to lead them toward states of *εὐδαιμονία*, and his proper work is manifest in the various kinds of procreation that afford them participation in immortality.

Chapter six shows how the nature of Eros as an intermediate binding together *Πόρος* and *Πενία* functions as the cause (*αἰτία*) that moves individuals upward in the ascent to the vision of the beautiful itself. The understanding of Eros as poor and as disposition in the lover as he makes his ascent is depicted at each level of the ascent. Poverty, as it appears in the discussions of immortality, procreation, and ascent, is revealed as

dispositional, in relation to a resourcefulness and productivity, and is embedded in the descriptions of Eros that occur at each level of soul; in the ascent passage itself it appears in the ‘relaxing’² of the soul’s passion toward objects it has found *σμηκρός* in relation to other objects; it is captured in the description of the penultimate stage of the ascent, which presents the lover as procreating in *φιλοσοφία ἄφθονος*, and is the precondition for the vision of beauty itself.

The final chapter, drawing upon the analysis of previous chapters, argues that the reexamination of the role of poverty in the *Symposium* reveals that the account of Eros offered there describes a *κάθαρσις* of the affective element in human beings, parallel to the *κάθαρσις* of the rational element described in Plato’s *Phaedo*. Consequently, the poverty of Eros describes a disposition that is the necessary condition for the final vision of Beauty as well as a habit or practice by which this disposition is maintained.

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between poverty and Eros as it exists in the *Symposium*. Some reference will be made to dialogues generally agreed to be from the same period of Plato’s thought and writing.³ This study does not propose to put forward a comprehensive theory of love, or to demonstrate the development of a Platonic theory of love as emerging from the generally accepted chronological order of the dialogues. Rather, it is intended to examine the nature of the lack or poverty that is

² *Symposium* 210b5, 211b6, c1.

³ R. E. Allen suggests that the *Symposium* should be read with the *Protagoras*, given the presence of most of the same characters in both dialogues. He cites Cornford and Robin as suggesting that it is a “companion piece” to the *Phaedo*. *The Dialogues of Plato, vol. 2: The Symposium*, translated with comment by R. E. Allen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991) 8-12.

presented as essential to the nature of Eros in the *Symposium* and to demonstrate the development of this concept alongside the concept of Eros in that same dialogue.

In what follows, I will discuss the major schools of Platonic interpretation, and then present the major interpretations of Platonic Eros from the twentieth century, with special attention to the development and influence of the position that the lack of Eros indicates that it is egoistic or egocentric. The first section discusses global issues of interpretation, including schools adhering to esoteric hermeneutics, the chronology of the Platonic dialogues, and the importance of the dialogue form. In the second section, I will discuss authors writing in the early part of the twentieth century, prior to the rise of the discussion of the putatively egocentric nature of Eros. My discussion here centers on Cornford's presentation, which is in general agreement with those given by Grube, Robin, and Friedländer.⁴ In the third section, I will focus on the scholarly debate that becomes popular in the second half of the twentieth century, and focuses on the egocentric or egoistic nature of Eros that develops in response to Nygren's *Agape and Eros* and Vlastos's landmark article, *On the Individual as Object of Love*.⁵ In the fourth section, I will discuss some responses to the view that Platonic Eros is egoistic or

⁴ F. M. Cornford, "The Doctrine of Eros in Plato's *Symposium*," in *The Unwritten Philosophy and Other Essays*, edited with an introductory memoir by W.K.C. Guthrie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950; reprint Aylesbury: Hazell Watson & Viney Ltd., 1967); G. M. A. Grube, *Plato's Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958); Paul Friedländer, *Plato*, 3 vols., translated by Hans Meyerhoff (New York: Pantheon Books Inc., 1958); Léon Robin, *La Théorie Platonicienne de l'Amour* (Paris: Félix Alcan et Guillaumin Réunies, 1908). Though his writings date from a later period, this view is also in accord with that articulated by W. K. C. Guthrie in *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. 4 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1978).

⁵Nygren, op. cit.; Vlastos, op. cit.

egocentric that attempt to show that this rendering of Platonic Eros is, at best, a partial and incomplete account of Plato's thought on the subject.

A Note on Interpretation

The scholarship regarding Plato and his *Symposium* is extensive; in addition to the works commenting on Plato's thought generally and on the *Symposium* in particular, there are traditions and schools of interpretation that have influenced the long discussion in Plato scholarship. These schools and traditions of interpretation pose a particularly difficult problem for anyone attempting a history of the literature and debate on a particular topic. This is, in part, due to the different ways in which such schools and traditions may be divided. Where one author divides interpreters according to their acceptance or rejection of esoteric doctrine,⁶ another divides them according to their acceptance or rejection of the systematic nature of Plato's work.⁷ In addition to these global issues of interpretation, there is disagreement as to whether any accurate chronology of Plato's dialogues can be achieved and whether this should influence the

⁶ Francisco J. Gonzalez, *The Third Way: New Directions in Platonic Studies* (Lanham, Md: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1995) 1-22.

⁷ E. N. Tigerstedt, *Interpreting Plato* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1977). Tigerstedt draws a distinction between those who see philosophy as system and those who see system as anathema to philosophy, resulting in two approaches to interpreting Plato—as a coherent and consistent system or as a continuing and developing search for truth and understanding. He also draws attention to two other much-debated issues in Platonic interpretation: Plato's choice of the dialogue form and his use of irony. These two aspects of Plato's work create special difficulties for understanding Plato's thought because they make it difficult to make unequivocal claims about Plato's intentions in his writings.

interpretation of the individual dialogues.⁸ The Tübingen school is a proponent not only of esotericism but also of reconstructing Plato's "system of philosophy" on the basis of Plato's esoteric doctrine.⁹ Students of Leo Strauss hold to a kind of esotericism distinct from that of the Tübingen school, are in fact critical of the approach of this school, and generally resist an approach to Platonic interpretation that attempts to reconstruct a "system of philosophy".¹⁰ I mention these very different kinds of esotericism to emphasize the difficulty of giving a brief critique or assessment of esotericism in Platonic interpretation. This is further difficult because, prior to the very explicit esotericism of Straussians and the Tübingen school, scholars did consider many of the same issues taken up by the esotericists as part of their interpretation of Plato.¹¹ The esotericists of the Tübingen sort are distinguished primarily by making the esoteric doctrine the primary or superior instrument of interpretation, rather than taking the Platonic dialogues as the

⁸ John Cooper, introduction to *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997) vii-xviii.

⁹ C. J. de Vogel, *Rethinking Plato and Platonism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986) 3-56; W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy, vol. V: The Later Plato and the Academy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978) includes a good discussion of the interpretive problems inherent in the approach of the Tübingen school. See in particular pages 420-423.

¹⁰ Stanley Rosen, *Plato's Symposium*, Second Edition (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987).

¹¹ See for instance John Burnet, *Greek Philosophy: Thales to Plato*, Reprint Edition (London: MacMillan and Company, Limited, 1932); W. K. C. Guthrie *History*, vols. IV and V; F. M. Cornford, *Principium Sapientiae: The Origins of Greek Philosophical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952); Friedrich Solmsen, *Plato's Theology*, Cornell Studies in Classical Philology, vol. 28, edited by Harry Caplan, James Hutton, and H. L. Jones (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1942; reprint New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1967).

primary source.¹² The Straussians are distinguished, similarly, by their emphasis on irony and silence in the interpretation of Platonic dialogues. Thus, what they have in common as esotericists is their use of an unknown as an instrument for understanding Plato.

The students of Leo Strauss adopt varying interpretive positions, but in general share the view expressed by Rosen, that irony is “the central problem in the interpretation of Plato”.¹³ A consequence of this position is an emphasis on the meaning of what remains unsaid within a given dialogue. This has the rather happy consequence of encouraging readers to enter into the dialogue itself, submitting to what Rosen calls a “medicinal rhetoric” that aims to turn the souls of men toward the good.¹⁴ There is, I think, some value, especially pedagogically, in the position Stanley Rosen adopts: “The first step in the study of Plato is easy to state, even trivially obvious, and yet seldom honored: to see the dialogues in their own words, independently of presuppositions derived from modern conceptions of historical development or sound argumentative technique”, but he follows this statement with the claim that the result of this step is to recognize irony as “the central problem in the interpretation of Plato” and consequently fails to meet his own standards, since the appeal to this use of irony is based on a view of

¹² It is notable that Stanley Rosen criticizes them on just this point, i.e., for making the Platonic dialogues secondary in their interpretation of Plato.

¹³ Rosen, *Symposium*, xlii. Rosen also complains that modern readers have lost an appropriate sense of irony (in part because of a lack of persecution of writers!) and so have more trouble in understanding Plato. I can only think he has not read his Walker Percy and so had his attention drawn to the deeply ironic nature of the American Southerner. Perhaps, given the Southerner’s naturally ironic disposition, it is to this quadrant that we should turn for better Platonic interpretations.

¹⁴ Rosen, xlviii.

the historical political position of an author in Ancient Greece.¹⁵ In part because I disagree with such undue emphasis on one feature of Plato's dialogues, and in part because I think it is difficult to make a convincing argument for the truth of what Plato did not say, I have not devoted much space to interpretations that appeal primarily to irony and silence as hermeneutic principles.¹⁶

Such are, in brief, some of the difficulties inherent in esotericism and in conversing with its proponents. As I noted above, however, several issues taken up by esotericists have long formed a part of the scholarly discussion of Plato and Platonism. Among these are the influence on Plato of the Pre-Socratics, Pythagoreanism, Orphicism, and Greek Mystery religions generally, and the use that Plato made of these traditions. The *Symposium*, in particular, is noted for its allusions to Greek Mystery religions and consequently some discussion of these aspects of the dialogue will form a part of the interpretation I offer here. In discussing these aspects of Plato's dialogues, I make no claim to special knowledge, nor do I employ the interpretive methods of esotericism. Rather, I turn to these dramatic features of Plato's work in recognition of their significance to the medium in which Plato chose to convey his thought.

It seems neither possible nor desirable to separate Plato's philosophy from the setting in which he placed it, and so also that the dialogue form, the dramatic structure of the dialogue one is studying, its relationship to other dialogues, its language, and various

¹⁵ Rosen, xlii. His further remark that "What counts is the application of sound techniques in a particular case and the "soundness" of the techniques can be finally judged only by their results" (xxxix) is a bit dubious if not an explicit begging of the question.

¹⁶ The interested reader can peruse the works of Seth Benardete, Allan Bloom, Leo Strauss, and Stanley Rosen, among others.

other dramatic elements bear significantly upon the interpretation of any given Platonic dialogue. In short, whatever argument is being made can only be understood within the context of the dialogue—in both its philosophical and dramatic elements. Consequently, I will make use of such features in articulating my own interpretation of Plato.

A second prominent issue in Platonic interpretation is the chronology of the dialogues and whether the relationship of the dialogues to one another must be understood with respect to their chronology. Recently, John Cooper has argued against the position that the dialogues should be understood as revealing the development of Plato's thought based on their chronological order.¹⁷ The primary issues are that there is some dispute regarding both the method for dating the dialogues and the precise dating of the dialogues. This has at times resulted in particular dialogues being understood as belonging to the wrong period. The changeable nature of the dating of the dialogues seems then to pose an obstacle to understanding Plato's work. Nonetheless, it has been common throughout the twentieth century for Plato scholars to refer to dialogues as belonging to the early, middle, or late periods, and to consider the chronological place of a dialogue when interpreting it. In particular, the chronological order of dialogues is used as a guide as to which dialogues may be profitably read together and as a means to make sense of apparent disparities in the positions affirmed in dialogues from different periods. Such reference to the chronological order of the dialogues should be distinguished from a strict adherence to chronology that uses chronology as the dominant or guiding

¹⁷ Cooper, xii-xviii.

hermeneutic principle.¹⁸ A complete lack of attention to issues of chronology, however, might lead to the conclusion that there is no consistency to Plato's thought whatsoever and also no development in his approach to philosophical problems. Either of these extremes seems to pose problems for readers of Plato.

Platonic Eros in the Early Part of the Twentieth Century

In the early part of the twentieth century, writers such as Cornford and Grube describe Eros as a "fund of energy"¹⁹ or "stream of desire"²⁰ that can be trained or directed toward different objects. This understanding of the *Symposium's* account of Eros draws on the teachings of other Platonic dialogues, especially those of the *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, and the *Phaedo*. Understood with these other dialogues, as a part of Plato's moral philosophy and as related to the tripartite division of the soul, Eros is viewed as the moving force of the soul, as neither good nor evil in itself, but as taking its goodness from the object toward which it is directed. Cornford's interpretive approach is organized around four central points: the nature of Eros itself; the mythical representation of Eros, especially as it portrays Eros as an intermediate or *metaxy*;²¹ the

¹⁸ Terence Irwin's *Plato's Moral Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), for example, studies Plato's approach to ethics as it develops according to the chronological order of the dialogues; the study is predicated on the idea that the chronological order of the dialogues reveals a development of Plato's thought.

¹⁹ F. M. Cornford, "The Doctrine of Eros in Plato's *Symposium*," 71.

²⁰ Grube, 115.

²¹ The development of the concept of eros as *metaxy* is more developed in the writings of Paul Friedländer, *Plato*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*, translated by Hans Meyerhoff (New York: Pantheon Books Inc., 1958), 32-58.

relation of the nature of Eros to the education of Eros described in the ascent passage; and the final end of Eros, i.e., participation of the soul in immortality by virtue of its vision of the forms. Cornford's interpretation is characterized by approaching an understanding of Eros in relation to the soul and to the end of man, not in isolation from these. The following passage from Cornford explains Eros in this way, using as its starting point the tripartite division of the soul articulated in the *Republic*:

Hence it appears that we are not to think of the soul as divided into reason, a thinking part, on the one side, and irrational appetite on the other; or of the internal conflict as between passionless reason, always in the right, and passion and desire, usually in the wrong. That analysis would point to an ascetic morality of the repression and mortification of the flesh, the extinction of passion and desire, leaving only dispassionate contemplation.[...]But the *Republic* is concerned with this life and the best that can be made of our composite nature, in which all three forms of desire claim their legitimate satisfaction. Hence the conception of virtue is centred in the notion of a harmony of desires—a condition in which each part pursues its appropriate pleasure and finds its truest satisfaction, without thwarting or perverting the others. There is for each type of man one best possible balance or harmony of various desires. The condition may not be perfect; but it is more stable and happier than any other.

Beyond this lies an ideal solution, which would produce the perfect individual. In the later books of the *Republic* that solution is stated on the intellectual side. There is a higher education which might end in perfect knowledge and fashion the only type of man who ought to take control of human society—the philosopher-king. But the process is not purely intellectual; it involves the education of desire. This aspect is developed in the *Symposium*, in the theory of Eros, the name for the impulse of desire in all its forms. We are now to learn that the three impulses which shape three types of life are not ultimately distinct and irreducible [71] factors, residing in three separate parts of a composite soul, or some in the soul, some in the body. They are manifestations of a single force or fund of energy, called Eros, directed through divergent channels towards various ends. This conception makes possible a sublimation of desire; the energy can be redirected from one channel to another. The flow can be diverted upwards or downwards. The downward process is analysed in the eighth and ninth books of the *Republic*. It leads to the hell of sensuality in the tyrannical man. The upward process is indicated in the *Symposium*.²²

²² Cornford, "The Doctrine of Eros in Plato's *Symposium*," 70-1.

In Cornford's analysis, Eros is the general name given to the experience of desire, regardless of the objects toward which it is directed.²³ This emphasizes a fact of human experience: that we feel ourselves moved by objects other than ourselves and that these objects are the catalyst for our desires, our deliberations, and subsequent actions.

Cornford's analysis focuses on the psychological fact of desire and on Plato's description of it; what are experienced as diverse desires for diverse objects are then explained in terms of one desire which may be directed toward diverse objects. Just as the eye views many objects that all belong to the visible with the power of sight, so Eros is directed toward many objects that are, in one way or another, desirable. What distinguishes types of Eros are their respective objects, the same objects that distinguish the three types of lives in the *Republic*, as each is characterized by directing its desire toward the pleasurable, honorable, or good itself.

It is in this last sense, in Cornford's view, that Eros is intermediate, and this intermediate status is depicted in (and at least in part the reason for) the myth of his origins. As a 'fund of energy' it is intermediate because it can be directed upward or downward; Cornford shows this in his interpretation of the *Symposium's* discussion of Eros as intermediate, and so also draws attention to the contribution of the mythical depiction of Eros to Diotima's discourse as a whole:

In mythical terms, Eros is neither god nor mortal, but a daimon intermediate between the two—one of those spirits through whom intercourse between the divine and mortal worlds is maintained. For the

²³ This view is shared by R. A. Markus, "The Dialectic of Eros in Plato's *Symposium*," *The Downside Review* 73: 219-230 and David Halperin "Platonic *Erôs* and What Men Call Love," *Ancient Philosophy* 5: 161-205, 162.

object of Eros is to be found in both worlds, the seen and the unseen; here there is visible beauty, a likeness of the invisible beauty yonder; and Eros lends to Psyche the wings that will carry her across the boundary. But the point here is that desire, in itself, is neutral, neither good nor bad; it takes its value from its object.²⁴

The psychological experience of Eros is connected with its metaphysical explanation in Cornford's analysis. The experience of a 'fund of energy' that can be directed toward different objects is also identified as the moving force of the soul; Eros is not merely experiential, but has its being in the soul itself.²⁵ Cornford writes that "in Plato the soul which is detached from the body is the rational intelligence, moved by its own characteristic desire to recover the antenatal vision of truth."²⁶ This 'characteristic desire' is Eros, and it is the means by which the soul moves toward the divine.

The final two aspects of Cornford's analysis to which I would like to draw attention are the final end of Eros and the ascent to this final end. Because Eros is joined to the soul as its motive force, Eros and the soul share the same final end—the source of goodness and beauty that is the goal of the ascents in both the *Symposium* and the *Republic*. Similarly, the ascents of these two dialogues describe the progress of the affective and rational elements of the soul, respectively. Based upon his understanding of the nature of Eros and its relation to the soul, Cornford views the ascent passage in relation to the theory of education and training of desire in the *Republic*.

²⁴ Cornford, "The Doctrine of Eros in Plato's *Symposium*," 72.

²⁵ One might go further and assert that the metaphysical status of eros is that of daimon, but Cornford does not argue this, and to do so would be to argue that Plato's myths are meant to be understood literally.

²⁶ Cornford, *Principium Sapientiae*, 87.

The Greater Mysteries of Eros begin where the musical education of the *Republic* ends; namely in the passion for beauty and goodness as revealed in an individual person. The purpose of that lower education is to produce in the soul reasonableness, the rhythms of harmony and grace, and simplicity of character. These qualities, it is hinted, are images, existing in individual souls, of the eternal ideals of temperance, courage, and the other virtues. Such an image, says Socrates, is ‘the loveliest object of contemplation to him who is able to behold it’. It inspires the passion of love in the ‘musical man’. The love of beauty in an individual person is meant, though the physical side of this passion is expressly excluded. ‘Music’, Socrates concludes, ends where it should end, in the passion for beauty.

Now in Diotima’s discourse the Greater Mysteries of Eros take this for their point of departure. They describe the conversion of Eros from the love of a single beautiful person to the love of Beauty itself. The upward journey of emotion runs parallel to the upward journey of the intellect in the mathematical and dialectical studies of the *Republic*. The intellect soars from the world of sense to the source of truth and goodness; but the wings on which it rises are the wings of desire for the source of beauty. The true self, the divine soul, is not a mere faculty of thought and dispassionate contemplation of truth; it has its own principle of energy in the desire kindled by goodness in the guise of the beautiful. The intimations of immortality already discernible in the lower forms of Eros are now confirmed when its true nature is disclosed as a passion for immortality in an eternal world.²⁷

This analysis emphasizes not only the parallel motions of Eros and reason in their respective ascents but also the nature of the soul in the ascent.²⁸ Eros and reason alike must undergo conversion in the process of education in order to attain the vision of the good itself.

²⁷ Ibid., 85-6.

²⁸ The ascents discussed in the *Republic*, *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, and *Phaedrus* have been connected by some authors with the movement of dialectic and the movement of the elenchus. Erwin Rohde, *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Greeks* translated from the eighth edition by W. B. Hillis (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul: 1925; reprint, London: Lund Humphries, 1950) connects the erotic ascent of the *Symposium* with the concept of *κάθαρσις* (and with other “ascents” in the Platonic corpus; with the movement of dialectic and the elenchus with purification). See also Kenneth Dorter, “Three Disappearing Ladders in Plato,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 29, no. 3 (1996): 279-299.

In view of the soul's nature as divine, the Eros that moves the soul upward is an Eros directed toward divinity and the immortality proper to divinity. The final end of Eros is participation in immortality, but not merely the mortal immortality that is described at the lower levels of Eros. Rather, because the soul is itself divine, it participates in the kind of immortality proper to divinity, the immortality that consists in being always the same.

At last [the final stage of Eros in the *Symposium*] by the strength gathered in these regions of contemplation, the soul becomes capable of a revelation that comes, if it comes at all, 'suddenly'. Plato here borrows from the Eleusinian mysteries the language of the Sacred Marriage and of the final revelation, when the ancient symbols of divinity were disclosed to the purified initiate in a sudden blaze of light. The soul is united with the divine Beauty, and itself becomes immortal and divine. The offspring of the marriage are not phantoms of goodness like those images of virtue which first inspired love for the beautiful person. The child of Love and Beauty is true virtue, dwelling in the soul that has become immortal as the lover and the beloved of God.²⁹

The attention to myth, the intermediate status of Eros, the depiction of Eros as a daimon, and to the various formulations of the meaning of the term Eros are present in other authors of the same period. Both Léon Robin and Paul Friedländer focus on the portrayal of Eros as a daimon, as intermediate, and on the implications of the myth of Eros in Diotima's speech as important to understanding the nature of Eros depicted in that dialogue.³⁰ The salient feature of this interpretation is its characterization of Eros as source or fund of energy; from this understanding of the nature of Eros, Platonic Eros is joined to Platonic education understood as a channeling of this common source or fund of

²⁹ Cornford, *Principium Sapientiae*, 86

³⁰ Léon Robin, *La Théorie Platonicienne de l'Amour* (Paris: Félix Alcan et Guillaumin Réunies, 1908; Paul Friedländer, *Plato*. Vol. 1.

energy, the energy or power to move that belongs to the soul and may be directed by reason. Thus, as Guthrie has written, the soul is described as “not simply reason, but eros totally absorbed in the quest for truth”.³¹

The writers of this period focus on the issue of Eros’s lack only inasmuch as it is part of the myth of his origins and as part of the dialectical movement to establish the intermediate nature of Eros. The definition of Eros as lack of the desired object that is the result of Socrates’ questioning Agathon is treated as a step away from a false conception of Eros as beautiful and good himself and as necessarily inculcating virtue in those who follow him; and as a step toward the conception of Eros as intermediate between good and evil. The depiction of Eros as poor, deficient, or needy does not feature largely in these discussions, though it is discussed in the context of the myth of Eros’s origins. The authors are also alike in applying the nature of Eros as established through a discussion of his intermediate nature to the ascent passage, which is to say that the goodness of Eros is determined by its object. It is notable, however, that though poverty and lack are not made thematic in the writers of this period, both Rohde and Cornford connect the ascent passage of the *Symposium* with the *κάθαρσις* of the *Phaedo*.³² None of the authors cited above, however, treat the theme of poverty or lack as it emerges in the dialogue alongside the developing concept of Eros. As we shall see in the next section, the issue of Eros’s lack becomes central to the scholarly discussion in the latter part of the twentieth century.

³¹ Guthrie, *History*, 4: 556.

³² See Cornford, *Principium Sapientiae*, c. 5 and Rohde, *Psyche*, c. 13.

*Platonic Eros in the Mid- to Late-Twentieth Century:
The Rise of the Egoistic Interpretation*

The Platonic scholarship of the last half of the twentieth century has been dominated by debate over the egoistic or egocentric nature of Eros.³³ Noting the characterization of Eros as a desire for what the lover lacks, scholarly discussion centers on the question of whether Eros is solely acquisitive or egocentric in nature, leaving no room for love for another person for her own sake.³⁴ This is perhaps due to the influence of Anders Nygren who is frequently noted for his indictment of Eros as acquisitive and egocentric; indeed his work seems to set the stage for much subsequent discussion.³⁵ The philosophical discussion that develops in response to Nygren's work focuses on two

³³ Some of the literature treats egoism and egocentrism as interchangeable terms. The negative connotation of both terms is one that indicates a selfishness akin to possessiveness or acquisitiveness as contrasted with altruism. Insofar as the debate is largely rooted in Nygren's critique, it is perhaps worth noting that he uses the term 'egocentric' in contrast to the term 'theocentric'; removed from the context of this discussion, egocentrism takes on, it seems, a different meaning. Vlastos also uses the term 'egocentric', but Santas calls his version 'egoistic'. Needless to say, one of the difficulties in the scholarly discussion is the inconsistency in the definitions of egoism, egocentrism and the usage of these terms by the various authors. The meanings of the terms are further complicated by the association of 'egoism' with moral and psychological theories. I have tried consistently to employ the terms employed by the authors I am discussing, even though these authors do not always use one term to the exclusion of the other or provide definitions for their terms. Where authors do provide definitions for these terms, I have cited them.

³⁴ Catherine Osborne, *Eros Unveiled: Plato and the God of Love* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1994); Vlastos op. cit.; Grube op. cit.

³⁵ Nygren writes that "the very fact that Eros is acquisitive love is sufficient to show its egocentric character: for all desire, or appetite, and longing is more or less egocentric... The aim of love is to gain possession of an object which is regarded as valuable and which man feels he needs," 180.

primary and related issues: the problem of egoism in ancient conceptions of love and the question of what constitutes an adequate theory of love.³⁶ In some authors, the two issues are not clearly separated from one another; others seem to attempt a response to one within the context of the other, and this seems only to obscure the issue at hand. What seems to pervade the discussion, from Vlastos forward, is the idea that Eros, because it involves lack or deficiency, is always seeking to acquire what it lacks, and so is, in some sense at least, vulnerable to Nygren's charges.³⁷ This understanding of Eros is then further examined within the context of a theory of love, implicitly or explicitly expressed, that views the love between two individuals as paradigmatic or at the very least as an indispensable component of a theory of love, and it must be included that this love has a self-sacrificial character; altruism is its test.³⁸

Gregory Vlastos, for instance, in his (1973) article *The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato*, criticizes Nygren for neglecting "to reckon with the fact that *philia* is a near-synonym of *agape*"³⁹ and proceeds to search Plato's treatments of both *philia* and

³⁶ Halperin and Santas address the latter explicitly, Vlastos implicitly. Within this larger framework, however, the issue of egoism seems always to surface, as the charge against ancient and especially Platonic accounts of love.

³⁷ A particularly interesting lacuna in this line of inquiry is a consideration of the nature of the lack that belongs to eros.

³⁸ The love between individuals that is described here is, in some sense, the descendant of Romantic or courtly love, insofar as it seeks a theory of love that views the individual as loved for her own sake, for the virtue she embodies, and for whom the lover is willing to make great sacrifices. This view is, however, not restricted to the relationship of lovers, but seen to apply to the relations between parent and child, friends, or siblings. An interesting discussion of the different conceptions of love—Platonic, Christian, Freudian, and Romantic—that influence the contemporary reader may be found in Thomas Gould, *Platonic Love* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963).

³⁹ Vlastos, 6, n. 13.

Eros for the understanding “that to love a person we must wish for that person’s good for that person’s sake, not for ours....”⁴⁰ In his treatment of the *Symposium*, Vlastos concludes that “...the individual cannot be as lovable as the Idea; the Idea, and it alone, is to be loved for its own sake; the individual only so far as in him and by him ideal perfection is copied fugitively in flux.”⁴¹ Vlastos acknowledges that Platonic Eros is not “as “egocentric” and acquisitive” as Nygren has claimed: it is only too patently Ideocentric and creative.”⁴² But in the end, he attributes to it “the spiritualized egocentricism of Socratic *philia*.”⁴³ Though Vlastos recognizes that Eros ends in creative activity that produces beautiful things, he holds that this activity is still egoistic since “it is not said or implied or so much as hinted at that “birth in beauty” should be motivated

⁴⁰ Ibid., 6.

⁴¹ Ibid., 34.

⁴² Ibid. 30. John Rist in *Eros and Psyche* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), 23, draws attention to the ostensibly ideocentric nature of eros: “We are not then to love the Gods, but Wisdom and the Forms; and this, as Plato must have been well aware, is a paradoxical notion. For to most men love is a very personal emotion. Is it possible to experience love for realities which are in a sense abstractions? The history of Platonism in the Ancient World shows, as we shall see, that this kind of love was too rarefied to last. Plato was demanding an emotional response beyond the range of most of even the greatest of his admirers, and with this tacit condemnation many modern scholars and critics would agree.” In support of this claim he cites a passage from Grube’s *Plato’s Thought*, which iterates a similar doubt of the plausibility of an account of love that is, at first glance, so impersonal. Underlying this criticism is the complaint that love of individuals is the paradigm or at the very least crucial to any adequate theory of love; this is one of the major trends in modern scholarship on the issue (see e.g. Santas and Halperin); underlying this criticism too, though, is the view, shared by Grube and Cornford, that the conception of eros that Plato articulates is one that argues for a channeling of a common source or fund of energy, the energy or power to move that belongs to the soul and may be directed by reason; the implication here, however, is quite clearly that reason alone does not move.

⁴³ Vlastos, 30.

by love of persons—that the ultimate purpose of the creative act should be to enrich the lives of persons who are themselves worthy of love for their own sake.”⁴⁴ The motivation for “birth in beauty” is limited to the lover’s desire for self-perfection and her desire to fulfill the experienced deficiency that is characteristic of Eros. Thus, though Vlastos begins his article by noting the deficiency of Nygren’s account, his final conclusions regarding Platonic love are not far removed from Nygren’s own. As Osborne notes:

His [Vlastos’s] article...reflects some of the same concerns as Nygren, and although Vlastos disagrees with Nygren’s one-sided and inadequate understanding of what the Greeks could regard as love, he does not actually break loose from the dichotomy that he inherits from Nygren...But for Vlastos some charges are still justified against Plato, though not simply for taking love to be an egoistic tendency, as Nygren’s challenge had stressed, but also for his failure to value the individual, seeing in love only an admiration of the qualities that an individual instantiates, and not the individual as a person in her own right.⁴⁵

Osborne’s conclusions regarding Vlastos’s work are significant, for scholarship on the concept of Eros subsequent to Vlastos’s article draw upon his thought and work. Evidence of this is seen not only in the ubiquitous citing of his article, but also in the continued presence of the issues of egoism and possibility of the individual as an object of love in Plato’s thought. Two premises, implicitly or explicitly stated, appear in subsequent authors: that the concept of self-perfection in Plato is egocentric; and that the concept of Eros is egocentric.⁴⁶ Indeed, authors such as Santas seem to begin from the

⁴⁴ Ibid., 30-31.

⁴⁵ Osborne, appendix, 222.

⁴⁶ Ultimately, Vlastos himself seems to assert that Platonic eros is more ideocentric than egoistic, but his article as a whole, because of its indictment of ideal of self-perfection,

assumption that Eros, at least in its structure, is egoistic. Consequently, any attempt to defend Plato from accusations of egoism begins with its assumption, and generally follows by appealing to some one aspect or other of Plato's account that might provide for the possibility of a love that is not egoistic.⁴⁷

David Halperin (1985) and Gerasimos Santas (1988) both make use of a distinction between aim and object borrowed from Freud in interpreting Platonic Eros.⁴⁸ I have included both formulations of the distinction here because Halperin articulates more clearly what the "aim" signifies; Santas's discussion of the distinction, however, is significant because it contributes to (and perhaps is the basis for) his distinction between generic and specific Eros. David Halperin, in "Platonic *Erôs* and What Men Call Love" explains this distinction and its relevance in the *Symposium* as follows:

Plato provisionally agrees with his contemporaries, then, in regarding *erôs* as a response to the stimulus of visual beauty, but he strenuously disagrees with them about the nature of that response. Such is the point of

seems unable to avoid the conclusion that eros is also egoistic. It seems, too, that this exerts its influence on subsequent authors.

⁴⁷ See especially Timothy Mahoney, "Is Socratic *erôs* in the *Symposium* Egoistic?" *Apeiron* 29, no.1 (March 1996):1-18.

⁴⁸ Both authors are responding, in different ways, to the scholarly discussion of Plato's concept of love and the charge that Plato cannot offer a satisfactory theory of love. Santas's treatment, however, is meant to be a discussion of the relationship between the Platonic and Freudian accounts of love, whereas Halperin employs the Freudian terminology because he thinks that "this distinction helps to make conceptually clear what is already implicit in Plato. Diotima's discussion of *erôs*, for example, seems to be organized along the lines of the psychoanalytic distinction..." (196, n. 101). Though Halperin takes the historical Greek understanding of eros as appetite and then sexual desire for his starting point, his view is perhaps best epitomized in the following lines: "Plato enlarges the scope of desire (for that is what *erôs* primarily signifies) until it has become—if not the foundation for a theory of all love, as Gould claims—at least a substitute and replacement for other, more conventional ways of formulating the affective basis of human choice and motivation" (162).

Diotima's crucial and much-neglected distinction between the object and the aim of erotic desire: "Erôs is not for the beautiful, Socrates, as you suppose." "What is it, then?" "It is for birth and procreation in the beautiful" (206e). Leaving aside for the moment what Diotima means by 'birth and procreation in the beautiful', we must first examine the consequences of her denial that *erôs* is a desire for beauty. As her later, celebrated account of the Platonic lover's contemplative ascent to the Form of the Beautiful makes clear, Diotima does not intend to repudiate in the passage I have just quoted the common notion, which she elsewhere espouses, that beauty is the ultimate object of *erôs*: indeed, she has already admitted that *erôs* has something to do with beauty; it is all about beauty, as she rather cagily puts it ("Ἔρως δ' ἐστὶν ἔρως περὶ τὸ καλόν." 204b3; cf. 203c4, 206e1). Her insistence that *erôs* is a desire for 'birth and procreation in the beautiful' does not bear at all on the identity of the erotic object. Rather, in the passage quoted above Diotima is speaking entirely to the question of the erotic aim—that is, she is attempting to specify what the lover wants his erotic object *for*, what he wishes to do with it or to accomplish by means of it.⁴⁹

Similarly, Gerasimos Santas (1988) utilizes the distinction between object and aim in *Plato and Freud: Two Theories of Love*.⁵⁰ Writing on *Symposium* 204d-205a:

We can understand Diotima's questions by drawing a distinction between the object and the aim of Eros, parallel to the distinction Freud draws between the object and the aim of the sexual instinct: the object is that from which the attraction emanates or which the lover finds attractive; the aim is that towards which the instinct of eros strives.⁵¹

Applying this distinction, Santas argues that Diotima's questions indicate that the beautiful and the good are the objects of Eros. The aim, he asserts, is stated in Socrates'

⁴⁹ Halperin, 177.

⁵⁰ It is notable that Santas does not fault Nygren's account of Platonic eros. He writes: Thus, given the long history of the concept of Christian love comparisons to Plato are a complex matter, something that sometimes writers forget when they object to Nygren's thesis that Christian agape and Platonic eros have nothing in common. If we restrict this thesis to Nygren's interpretation of agape in the Gospels and St. Paul and to Plato's theory of eros in the *Symposium*, the thesis seems to me essentially correct. For a somewhat different conception of eros and agape, and hence different relations between them, see, e.g., Adams, R.M., 'Pure Love', *Journal of Religion and Ethics* (52, n.31).

⁵¹ Santas, 31.

replies and is summarized as follows: “Happiness is the final aim of all desire, and it consists in the possession of good things.”⁵² Santas derives a further proposition from Socrates’ replies: “The lover of good things loves the good things to be his for the sake of his own happiness.”⁵³ This last proposition, according to Santas, articulates the “egoistic model of eros”. This, along with his distinction between aim and object, allows him to conclude that “Eros is egoistic relative to its aim: in loving good things the aim of the lover is to make them *his own* for the sake of *his own* happiness. And insofar as the lover is successful in attaining his aim eros would bring happiness to the lover.”⁵⁴ Thus, Santas concludes:

For the present, we note that the deficiency and egoistic models of eros go well together. If one supposes that the source of eros is a perceived deficiency in the lover, it is natural to think that the lover’s aim will be to make up that deficiency in himself: he will love others insofar as he perceives them to be useful or valuable to himself in making up his deficiencies. This seems to be the conception that Plato has also of *philia* in the *Lysis*.⁵⁵

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Santas, 31-2. “In the case of love of things, as distinct from love of persons, this conception of love is perhaps natural; it is natural to think that when a man loves, say, wisdom and health, he loves to be healthy and wise; though when we add ‘for the sake of his own happiness’ we add an important qualification, since others’ having wisdom and health is thereby not included as part of Platonic eros. When we come to love of persons, the egoistic model begins to cut deeper. We have to suppose that when one loves another person, conceiving him or her to be good, the lover’s aim is to possess or make him or her his own for the sake of his own happiness. Care for the beloved, concern for his or her good or happiness is not excluded as incompatible with this love, but neither is it included in the aims of the lover. Benevolence toward the beloved is not necessarily part of Platonic eros” (32).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

From this conclusion, Santas proceeds to draw a distinction between generic and specific Eros. He has already distinguished two objects of Eros, the good and the beautiful, and so distinguishes two kinds of Eros according to these objects.⁵⁶ The textual ground for this distinction is found at *Symposium* 205b, where Diotima argues that the usage of *ποίησις* is similar to that of Eros, having come to be too narrowly applied given its original designation. Commenting on this passage, Santas writes:

Generically, poetry is the composing of all these things, but common linguistic practice gives the name of the whole to only a part of it. Presumably, this common linguistic use is an abuse because it hides the whole-part or genus-species relation that exists between poetry in general and that part of it concerned with music and meters. Similarly, Diotima continues, generically (*to men kephalaion*) eros is all desire for good things and happiness, but those who pursue him in a variety of ways—in money making, sports, philosophy—are not said to love (*eran*) and are not called lovers (*erastai*), whereas those who pursue him in one particular form are given the name of the whole, are said to love, and are called lovers (205d). This too is a linguistic abuse, presumably for the same reasons: it hides the relation of whole-part or genus-species, which according to Plato’s theory holds between eros of good things and eros of beautiful things.⁵⁷

Generic Eros is “for the good to be one’s own forever.”⁵⁸ “Taken in context, the definition says that the object of generic Eros is the good or good things, and that the aim of the lover is to make these things his own forever for the sake of his own happiness.”⁵⁹ Santas goes on to examine the ensuing dialogue, and finds in the exchange from 206b-, the definition of specific Eros: “The characteristic work of specific eros is the begetting

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid., 33.

⁵⁸Ibid., 34.

⁵⁹Ibid.

of offspring on a beautiful object by means of body or soul.”⁶⁰ The distinction between generic and specific Eros leads Santas to the conclusion that “unlike the case of generic eros, it is the beautiful rather than the good that is the attracting object; and unlike the former case where possession of the good was the aim, here the aim is not to possess the beautiful but to generate offspring on it.”⁶¹

Early on in his discussion of Eros, Santas distinguishes between the “deficiency model” of love and the “egoistic model” of love. It is notable that the deficiency⁶² and egoistic⁶³ models of love are based on propositions derived from Socrates’ elenchus of Agathon and Diotima’s elenchus of Socrates; thus Santas seems to be at variance with the view that the initial defining of the term, while not discarded, is neither complete nor the final formulation of the definition of the term in question. In his concluding treatment of Eros in the *Symposium*, he returns to these models:

Several things are noteworthy about eros proper as defined here. It is constituted by two desires, the desire to beget offspring, and the desire for the lover’s own immortality. Both desires satisfy the deficiency model, and the desire for immortality satisfies the egoistic model. Eros is

⁶⁰Ibid. Santas fails to note that Diotima’s question regarding the work of eros marks a change in the direction of her discourse that was forecast by Socrates’ remarks at 201e1, and that she is no longer giving an account of the nature of eros, but has turned to giving an account of its work. I cannot see good reason for dividing the text along genus-species lines when the words of the dialogue indicate a quite different division is appropriate.

⁶¹Ibid., 35.

⁶²“The third proposition is what we shall call ‘the deficiency model of desire’.” This is the third of the propositions that Santas identifies as resulting from Socrates’ elenchus of Agathon, and he states it as follows: “Of necessity, a desiring subject desires something it lacks, and when it does not lack something it does not desire it (200ab)” (Santas, 27).

⁶³Ibid., 31.

presumably beneficial to the lover insofar as immortality is something good. This eros may also be beneficial to the offspring, at least in cases where the offspring is a sentient being, animal or human; but concern and care of the offspring is conceived as a means to the lover's own immortality. Since the lover's own immortality is the final aim of this eros, eros proper can appropriately be said to be egoistic. We shall see shortly that this is fully confirmed by Diotima's subsequent explanations. Second, the definition contains an implicit reference to the relation between the two desires, that is, between begetting offspring and immortality: a means-end relation. In humans this relation is recognized by reason, as Diotima remarks; in animals presumably by instinct. Third, possession of the beautiful object referred to in the definition is not the aim of either desire; rather, its role seems to be as the attracting object which sparks or releases the desire to beget. Later, in the ladder of eros, beautiful objects also seem to assume the role as well of model for the creation of offspring. Thus, the structure of eros proper seems different from that of generic eros: in the latter it is the good rather than the beautiful that is the attracting object—or perhaps happiness—and it is possession of it, not generation or creation, that is the aim. Finally, in the explanation we have reconstructed, the desire for immortality assumes a new role, independent of its problematic derivation from generic eros: even if this derivation is mistaken, as it may be, the hypothesis of the desire for immortality may have genuine validity insofar as it explains the behavior of courting, mating, and offspring-rearing behavior.⁶⁴

Drawing upon Santas's distinction between generic and specific Eros, Timothy Mahoney has attempted to address the issue of egoism and Eros in "Is Socratic *erōs* in the *Symposium* Egoistic?" (1996) His division of the positions adopted in the literature is based not only upon authors' explicit claims regarding egocentrism or egoism and Eros, but also on the application of Santas's strong distinction between generic and specific Eros. Mahoney finds that this distinction is at the heart of fundamental disagreement among scholars about the nature of Eros itself because he sees the dialogue's division into the treatment of generic and specific Eros as corresponding to the dialogue's division into a treatment of lesser and greater mysteries, where the lesser mysteries entail egoism

⁶⁴Ibid., 38.

and the greater mysteries do not. Authors addressing issues of egoism, Mahoney argues, focus on one or the other of these definitions of Eros as primary in advancing their arguments, and may thus be catalogued according to whether they focus on generic or specific Eros.⁶⁵ Utilizing this method of division, Mahoney identifies three positions in the literature and describes them as follows:

- 1) Those who judge it[Eros] to be egoistic focus on what they take to be the acquisitive and egocentric aspects of Socrates's claim that *erōs* is wanting to possess the good forever for the sake of one's own *eudaimonia* (204e-5a, 206a).⁶⁶ [Mahoney places Vlastos, Kosman, Singer, Nussbaum, and Santas in this category.]
- 2) Those who judge it not to be egoistic focus on the benevolent and productive aspects of *erōs*: it causes mortals to give birth to and to nurture physical and 'spiritual' children (206b), to sacrifice themselves for these children when necessary (207b), and, at the highest levels of procreation, to give birth to and to nurture true virtue (212a).⁶⁷ [Mahoney places Markus, Armstrong, Gould,

⁶⁵ "Those who claim that Socratic eros is egoistic focus primarily on the portion of the dialogue which deals with generic eros—eros conceived of as the desire for happiness, understood as possessing goods forever" (Mahoney, 4). It is notable that here Mahoney cites "Santas 32-40 and n. 34 on generic and specific eros", where Santas identifies the text of 199c-206b as containing the foundation for the distinction between generic and specific eros. This division identifies generic eros as the subject of the passage beginning with the elenchus of Agathon and ending with Diotima's description of eros as "permanent possession of the good". Specific eros is then taken to be the subject of the remainder of Diotima's discourse. "Those who maintain that eros is not egoistic focus on the section which deals with specific eros: eros conceived of as the drive to produce and nurture children in order to possess goods vicariously through these children" (Mahoney, 6). Mahoney identifies these passages as including 205a9, beginning at the end of the first part of Diotima's speech and continuing until she begins "explaining the 'final and highest' mystery (210a1). This begins her description of the 'ladder of eros'" (Mahoney, 8). There are some weaknesses to Mahoney's division of the literature. The second position Mahoney identifies, for instance, argues for an *ordo amoris* that, ultimately, renders the question of egocentrism irrelevant; because he frames his question in terms of egocentrism, his categories of interpretation are not able to reflect the more nuanced positions of some of the authors he cites. Furthermore, he divides categories one and two according the focus on generic or specific eros, while some of his authors are writing prior to the strong distinction drawn between these by Santas.

⁶⁶ Mahoney, 2.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Brentlinger, Kraut, Moore, Halperin, Price, and, with caveat, Irwin, in this category.]

- 3) There is also a third group comprised of [*sic*] those who claim that *erōs* is egoistic at its lower levels, but non-egoistic at its highest level. [Mahoney places Cornford, Rist, and Moravcsik in this category.]⁶⁸

Mahoney's own position is the third of these, and this position, along with his division of the literature, reflects the consequences of the scholarly trend to assess the treatment of Eros in the *Symposium* in terms of egoism:

At its lower levels, Socratic *erōs* does not allow that one is motivated to promote the welfare of others for their own sake independently of a concern for one's own immortality and one's lasting reputation. In so far as Socratic *erōs* at these levels never severs one's concern for others from these self-centered desires, it is egoistic. But there is good reason to believe that at the highest level of Socratic *erōs* the desire for one's own immortality and one's lasting reputation is superseded by the desire to promote goodness in general. In fact, at the highest level of eros, promoting goodness in general is one's preeminent aim and how well one achieves it is the measure of one's happiness. Since the preeminent aim at this highest level of *erōs* is not self-centered, I conclude that at this level Socratic *erōs* in the *Symposium* is not egoistic.⁶⁹

Mahoney's division of the dialogue according to generic and specific Eros, moreover, appears to be a misconstrual of the structure and division of the dialogue. Socrates draws the lines of division at the beginning of his speech, when he commends the format of first articulating the nature of Eros and then speaking of the works of Eros. The section identified by Mahoney as addressing 'generic' Eros is the section that addresses the nature of Eros; the section he identifies as addressing 'specific' Eros is the section that addresses the works of Eros. This is clearly reflected in the language of the dialogue and

⁶⁸ Ibid., 2-3.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 3.

bears significantly upon its interpretation.⁷⁰ Further, Vlastos's note that Diotima never gives up the first definition of Eros as the desire to possess the good forever is correct; this definition is understood in a different manner in the second part of the dialogue precisely because this latter part addresses the works—and so also the manifestations—of Eros in the cosmos.

The four points that structure Cornford's explanation of Eros are not immediately apparent in the treatments of Mahoney and Santas. In these authors, the nature of Eros is limited to a conception of a desirer who is deficient with respect to the object of his love; even when engaged in procreation, this desirer is only a desirer possessing his initial deficiency and because of this possession rendered fecund. The nature of Eros as intermediate is not developed, nor the significance of his nature as at once *πόρος* and *πενία*; the relationship of Eros to the education of the soul is almost nonexistent, and the ascent passage is understood as a series of merely instrumental goods enjoyed on the way to the final end;⁷¹ the final end of Eros as participation in divine immortality is not distinguished from lower forms of participation in immortality because the distinction between the two kinds of immortality is not made, and consequently the relevance of this to understanding the activity characteristic of the highest level of the ladder of love is missed.

⁷⁰ The importance of the division of Socrates' speech into a section on the nature of eros and the works of eros will be discussed further in chapter six.

⁷¹ Irwin notes that, in the *Symposium*, "The means-end relation is replaced by the ascent from different embodiments of what is admirable and beautiful to the Form; though the non-final beautifuls are imperfectly beautiful, Plato never claims that they are purely instrumental" (*Plato's Moral Theory*, 166).

An aspect of Cornford's analysis that is perhaps relevant in discussing Mahoney is his emphasis on Eros as proper to the soul in its "original state"; Mahoney's divisions and his own position seem to presuppose that Eros begins with (or as) the basest kind of desire, that proper to the lowest part of the soul. Halperin and Santas proceed along similar lines. If one begins with this, then Eros can only become something beyond appetitive desire by a radical transformation, but always remains, at root the appetitive desire that drives humans and animals alike toward the satisfactions of hunger, thirst, and sex.⁷² But Cornford, having first outlined the tripartite nature of the soul, makes clear that the Eros in question is not the "lowest common denominator" as Mahoney's treatment suggests:

To return to the theory of Eros: the energy which carries the soul in this highest flight is the same that is manifested at lower levels in the instinct that perpetuates the race and in every form of worldly ambition. It is the energy of life itself, the moving force of the soul; and the soul was defined by Plato precisely as the one thing that has the power of self-motion. The Platonic doctrine of Eros has been compared, and even identified, with modern theories of sublimation. But the ultimate standpoints of Plato and of Freud seem to be diametrically opposed. [...]The self-moving energy of the human soul resides properly in the highest part, the immortal nature. It does not rise from beneath, but rather sinks from above when the spirit is ensnared in the flesh. So, when the energy is withdrawn from the lower channels, it is gathered up into its original source. This is indeed a conversion or transfiguration; but not a sublimation of desire that has hitherto existed only in the lower forms. A force that was in origin spiritual, after an incidental and temporary declension, becomes purely spiritual again. The opposition to Freud is not merely due to misunderstanding and prejudice. It is due to the fact that the religious consciousness of Christianity has been, almost from the first, under the influence of Platonism.⁷³

⁷² Halperin's treatment begins with just such a premise, with eros considered first and foremost as sexual desire. Perhaps this is what leads him to find Freudian distinctions "implicit" in Diotima's discourse.

⁷³ Cornford, "The Doctrine of Eros in the *Symposium*," 78-9.

Though Cornford is concerned to differentiate the Platonic theory of Eros from a Freudian theory of sublimated or repressed desire, he is not troubled by issues of egoism. Thomas Gould also concerns himself with this issue, though his treatment of Platonic love is extended to include a discussion of Romantic and Christian love as well, since such conceptions influence our ability to understand Platonic love on its own terms, and indeed, contribute to the tendency to criticize its shortcomings by measuring it according to standards of later eras. The assessment of Eros in terms of egoism indeed seems to be such a case. The most general response to the charge of egoism would involve addressing the issue of egoism as a meta-ethical issue, which results in recognizing its assumptions that (1) there is an underlying human nature and (2) what this nature is determines the very possibility of egoism with regard to the Eros in question. In brief, the overemphasis on egoism takes Eros out of its context, and assumes that an investigation of Eros removed from the context of Platonic metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics can give an adequate account of Platonic Eros. As R. E. Allen has recently written, “egoism has as its contrast altruism: but that contrast is otiose if the good of the self is the good of others.”⁷⁴ In the next section, I will briefly examine the contributions of two authors who reject the characterization of Eros as egoistic, and who do so by appealing to the evidence available in the Platonic corpus.

⁷⁴ Allen, 70.

*Platonic Eros in the Mid- to Late-Twentieth Century:
The Response to the Charge of Egoism*

Of those who have responded to the charge that Platonic Eros is egoistic, there are two in particular I will discuss here because they, more than others, I think, have drawn together a number of important features of Eros that are present in Diotima's discourse. Markus contributes an examination of the varying representations of Eros as god and as relation, and a discussion of the dialectical movement of the dialogue. These two aspects of his treatment situate Eros within the metaphysical and psychological on the one hand, and within Plato's dramatic and stylistic development of a theme, on the other. Kosman, in addition to addressing specific issues with the charge of egoism, draws attention to the presentation of Eros as *metaxy* and its relationship to lack or being *ἐνδεής*. In doing so, he also draws attention to an aspect of Platonic Eros that is conspicuously absent from the scholarly discussions of Eros as egoistic: the nature of the lack that is taken to be so central to egoistic Eros. Having understood Eros first and foremost according to the initial formulation of Eros as a desire for the beloved object that the lover necessarily lacks, the issue of the nature of this lack is passed over.

Plato's love is sometimes described as desire for an object not possessed. But this is a seriously misleading representation of the view found in the dialogues. It is true that in the *Symposium* eros is characterized as loving that which it loves when it doesn't have it: *οὐκ ἔργον αὐτὸ οὐ ἐπιθυμεῖ τε καὶ ἐρα.* But that characterization does not specify an essential feature of love's object; it specifies rather an accidental consequent of a stronger feature, namely that love is the desire for that of which the love is *ἐνδεής*, the desire for what one lacks.

That of which one is *ἐνδεής* is not simply that which one does not have, nor which one wants in the sense of desires, but that which one lacks, or wants in the sense of needing, missing and requiring for the fulfillment and completion of some nature. That of which a person is *ἐνδεής* is thus something to which he has, under some description and

relative to it, a claim or right. Only relative, of course, to that description: a person might desire something upon which he had no claim, which in no sense belonged to him, and still, relative to that desire, be ἐνδεής of the means of acquiring it.⁷⁵

Kosman's analysis points to the need for attention to the nature of the lack of Eros, and his further analysis in this article suggests that the lack of Eros is similar to the lack of the sensible world relative to the forms that are its cause.⁷⁶

In a well-known article, R. A. Markus notes that the elenchus is an important element in the movement of the dialogue as a whole, from the first speech given by *Phaedrus*, glorifying Eros as a god to the subsequent speeches focused on love as a relation, and back to the glorification of Eros as a god in Agathon's speech, only to move once again to Eros as relation in the elenchus.⁷⁷ These two depictions of Eros—as god and as relation—are brought together in modified form in Diotima's mythical account of

⁷⁵ L. A. Kosman, "Platonic Love," *Phronesis*, Supplementary Volume 2 (1976): 59.

⁷⁶ Such a reading is supported by the use of ἐνδεής to describe the deficiency of equality in the *Phaedo*.

⁷⁷ "Since then [Phaedrus's speech], the tendency, culminating in Aristophanes' speech, has been to lay all the stress on the relational quality of love: the principle of affinity of a part for its counterpart, the cohesive force which unites them in a complete whole. Agathon now asserts—and it is, except in rhetoric, a bare assertion—that 'love is, in the first place, supreme in beauty and goodness, and in the second place the cause of like qualities in other' (197 C).

This statement of Agathon's, is, of course, incompatible with the Aristophanic account, so far unchallenged, and Socrates pounces on it in his cross-questioning of Agathon. This bit of the genuine Socratic method is intended to reintroduce into the discussion the relational quality of love and adds nothing to the substance of what Aristophanes has already said except Agathon's easily won consent. The upshot of the discussion is that 'love' is a word which can only be used meaningfully in phrases like 'love of...'; but 'love of..' necessarily involves desire for...' and desire for...' is incompatible with 'possession of...' Agathon is tactfully reduced to silence, but the stress which his speech had placed on the 'perfection' of love at this stage in the dialogue served as a reminder of something that risked being forgotten" (Markus, 222-223).

the birth of Eros. Here, he is portrayed both in terms of his place with respect to the gods and as relational as the mediating daimon between gods and men. His intercourse with divinity is part of his nature as a daimon. In both of these senses, as god and as relation, Eros is presented as intermediate. As the particular kind of god he is, as daimon, Eros is the third term in a relation between gods and mortals. Indeed, the *Phaedrus*'s discussion of Eros as a type of mania is suggestive of just such a relation—one in which daemonic intervention leads the soul of man toward the divine.⁷⁸ The dialogue, then, moves back and forth between conceptions of Eros as relational and as divine, or one might say, between conceptions of Eros insofar as it is experienced psychologically and as it may be understood metaphysically. In the presentation of Eros as intermediate there is a constant shifting between these two senses of Eros; and while they may be understood distinctly and discussed separately, I think that Plato's own usage suggests that while they are distinct aspects of Eros, they are certainly not different metaphysical instances of Eros. That is to say, while we may discuss the psychological apart from the metaphysical, they are nonetheless one and the same Eros; our distinction is a distinction between perceived manifestations, not between kinds or discrete entities. The conception of Eros as divine possession that appears in the *Phaedrus* is a good example of just how Eros may be at once a daimon that leads a soul and a relation between that soul and its beloved object; in the *Phaedrus*, Eros possesses the soul, and joins it to the god in whose train it follows.

Another important contribution of Markus is his focus on the dialectical aspect of the dialogue. At the outset of his discussion, Markus identifies his objective as "to discern in the platonic 'dialectic of love' the features which have recommended it to

⁷⁸ *Phaedrus* 244a1-249e6.

Christian thinkers like St. Augustine and the pseudo-Dionysius....”⁷⁹ The view he takes understands the dialogue itself as dialectic, and the fruits of such an interpretation are indicated by his remarks below:

I have used the word ‘dialectic’, and—objectionable as it is—used it advisedly. For the truth about love which Socrates knows is being shown us as mediated by Plato’s account; and the subtleties of the dramatic structure in Plato’s account evoke a movement, not only from the superficiality of Phaedrus’ eulogy to Diotima’s discourse initiating Socrates into the ‘perfect revelation of love’ (210A), but also a movement within Socrates’ own statement. In both these movements—I shall hint at the way in which they constantly reflect each other—[the] positions established, though they are continuously subjected to criticism and modification, are never merely discarded. Thus Socrates in his speech is made to cover the ground already covered by the other speakers, refining, qualifying and deepening their contributions; and not only theirs, but what is both more important and less obvious, also his own. The dialogue as a whole, then, presents in a dramatic structure Plato’s view of love. Only this view is not systematically stated, but allowed to emerge in what, failing a better term, I have called a ‘dialectic’, in which the contribution made by Socrates is but one, though the culminating stage.⁸⁰

If Markus’s suggestion is correct, then those authors identifying the early formulation of Eros as a desire for what one lacks have only a fragment of Plato’s understanding of love, and have taken this one part to represent the whole. Remarkably, this seems to be precisely what Plato finds wanting in the speakers preceding Diotima; each considers only one aspect of Eros and so all fail to provide an adequate account of it.

The writings of Markus and Kosman suggest that a good deal is missing from current discussions of Platonic Eros, especially those focused on the issue of egocentrism. They draw our attention to the need for a discussion of the nature of lack in the *Symposium*, with attention to the manner in which Plato treats of a theme—the meaning

⁷⁹ Markus, 219.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 220-221.

of lack, as the meaning of Eros, will be presented in dialectical movement. The concept of lack plays an important role in the dialogue; it is reformulated along with the reformulations of Eros in Diotima's discourse, and thus develops alongside the concept of Eros. Such simultaneous reformulations are appropriate to the nature of Eros as intermediate or as *metaxy*, for it is in just this formulation that he has at once resource and poverty. The writings of Markus and Kosman also recall the four points articulated in Cornford's treatment of Eros: the nature of Eros; the intermediacy of Eros; the relation of Eros to the education of the soul and the ascent; and the final end of Eros as participation in divine immortality. Their conceptions of Eros are situated within an understanding of Platonic metaphysics, psychology, epistemology, and ethics.

In what follows, I will argue that the understanding of the relationship between poverty and Eros provides the foundation for understanding that Eros is not merely or even primarily acquisitive and egocentric. Rather, this relationship shows that Eros is better understood as activity and disposition. Though some of the interpretations considered above are consonant with an understanding of Eros as activity and disposition, none adequately addresses the role that poverty plays in the movement of Eros or in the disposition Eros.

CHAPTER TWO

MYTH AND RELIGION IN THE INTERPRETATION OF EROS IN THE
SYMPOSIUM

I have argued in chapter one that the emphasis on the deficiency of Eros that predominates the scholarly literature is in itself a deficient account of Eros. This is in part a consequence of the insufficient attention paid to the development of the concept of lack throughout the discourse of Diotima, but also due to the neglect of the theogonic account of Eros that she provides as an elucidation of his nature and intermediacy. In this account, Eros is presented as a child of Poverty (*πενία*) and Resource (*πόρος*). The dialogue's subsequent analysis of this account reveals that the parentage of Eros indicates his nature: as the child of poverty he is lack or deficiency and as a child of resource he is a way to something.⁸¹ In spite of the inclusion of a specific kind of poverty, i.e. *πενία*, in this account, the argument that Eros is acquisitive or egocentric focuses on the earlier formulation of Eros as in need (*ἐνδεής*) of his beloved object. Not only does such an interpretation neglect an important development in the dialogue's conception of lack, as I will argue in chapter three, it fails to recognize the centrality of the theogonic account of Eros in Diotima's discourse. For it is this passage that most clearly articulates the nature of Eros insofar as it involves lack and poverty, and so also this passage that is vital to understanding the nature of his lack.

That the centrality of Diotima's myth of Eros transforms the interpretation of the rest of her discourse will be shown in subsequent chapters. Reading the *Symposium* with

⁸¹ Guthrie notes "*Poros* means 'finding a way', resourcefulness" in W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Vol. I-VI (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 4: 375, n. 1.

an emphasis on this myth as central to its meaning, however, requires some consideration of the roles of myth and religion in the dialogue. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to a consideration of myth and religion in the *Symposium*. I would like to suggest at the outset, however, that the prominence of both of these in the *Symposium* is indicative of their importance to the dialogue as a whole and their relationship to one another. Though a thorough examination of the role of myth in Plato generally is beyond the scope of this study, I think it is necessary to make note of a few significant points.⁸² For the purposes of this study, I will survey commentaries on Diotima's myth in the *Symposium*, and, by examining the meaning of the term 'μῦθος', and its relation to or distinction from allegory, work toward a general understanding of the role of myth in order to show its place within the dialogue itself, especially insofar as this bears upon the interpretation of the relationship between Eros and poverty in the *Symposium*. In the second part of this chapter, I will focus on the role of myth as providing the foundation for prescribed action throughout the speeches in the *Symposium*, in order to show that this same relationship exists between Diotima's myth of Eros's origins and the way of Eros she describes in the lover's ascent to the Beautiful.⁸³

⁸² For a concise history of the scholarship on myth in Plato through the year 1978, see Kent F. Moors, *Platonic Myth: An Introductory Study* (Washington DC: University Press of America, 1982), 1-33. For a more recent discussion, see Luc Brisson, *Plato the Myth Maker*, translated, edited and with an introduction by Gerard Naddaf (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998) and Platon, *Le Banquet*, traduction inédite, introduction et notes par Luc Brisson (Paris: Flammarion, 1998).

⁸³ The idea that the presence of myth in a particular Platonic passage bears significantly upon its interpretation is not novel; both Friedländer and Stewart argue that the reader should not only attend to the myth, but to the significance of the mythical realm in order to understand Plato's meaning (Friedländer, *Plato*, vol. 1, c.2 and c. 9; J. A. Stewart, *The Myths of Plato* (London, New York: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1905).

Diotima's account of Eros's parentage is often referred to, categorized, or treated as a myth by commentators,⁸⁴ though neither Diotima nor Socrates identifies this account as a *μῦθος*. It is, in fact, for this reason that Moors's study of Platonic myth omits the *Symposium's* theogonic account from its catalogue of myths in the Platonic corpus.⁸⁵ The commentaries of Dover⁸⁶ and Rowe⁸⁷ remark on the contents of the account of Eros's parentage but make no remarks concerning whether it should be regarded as myth and what implications this might have for the interpretation of Diotima's discourse as a whole. The commentaries of Allen⁸⁸ and Bury⁸⁹ identify the account as myth, but Allen is focused on arguing against the Plotinian allegorical interpretation, while Bury, distinguishing his own interpretation from that of Plotinus, treats the myth as allegorical:

⁸⁴ Friedländer, *Plato*, vols. 1 and 3; Stewart, op. cit.; Robin, *La Théorie Platonicienne de l'Amour*; Plotinus *Ennead* III.5; Allen, *Symposium*; R. G. Bury, *The Symposium of Plato*, edited with introduction, critical notes and commentary (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons; London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co. Ltd., 1909).

⁸⁵ Moors, 52. "Eight terms are included in the catalogue [of mythical terms that appear in the Platonic corpus]: (1) *μῦθος*; (2) *μυθολογέω* (the verb indicating the telling of myth); (3) *μυθολογητέον* (the verbal adjective indicating the necessity of telling myths); (4) *μυθολογία* (a telling of myth); (5) *μυθολόγος* (a teller of myth); (6) *μυθολόγος* (concerning, or about, myth); (7) *μυθοποιός* (a maker of myth); and (8) *μυθώδης* (myth-like)" (Moors, 36).

⁸⁶ Dover's edition never identifies the passage specifically as myth, though he does comment on the various mythical elements in the text. The passage is treated as putting forward the nature of Eros by means of the personification of forces. Kenneth Dover, commentary on *Plato: Symposium*, Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

⁸⁷ C. J. Rowe, *Plato: Symposium*, edited with an introduction, translation and commentary (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips Ltd., 1998) commentary, 175-77.

⁸⁸ Allen addresses the tradition, originating with Plotinus, of interpreting the myth in allegorical terms, but is more concerned to address Plotinus's conclusion that Eros is itself an *οὐσία*, and so has little to say on the subject of myth itself (*Symposium*, 49-53).

⁸⁹ Bury, xxxix-xlii.

In the allegory the qualities which characterize Eros are fancifully deduced from an origin which is related in the authoritative manner of an ancient theogony. The parents of Eros are Poros and Penia. Poros is clearly intended to be regarded as a God (203B οἱ θεοί, οἳ τε ἄλλοι καὶ ὁ...Πόρος): he attends the celestial banquet and drinks nectar like the rest. The nature of Penia is less clearly stated: she cannot be a divine being according to the description of the divine nature as εὐδαίμων and possessing τὰγαθὰ καὶ καλὰ given in the context preceding (202c ff.); and the list of the qualities which she hands down to her son Eros shows that she is in all respects the very antithesis of Poros. We must conclude, therefore, that as Poros is the source of the divine side of the nature of Eros, so Penia is the source of the anti-divine side; and from the description of Eros as δαίμων, combined with the definition of τὸ δαιμόνιον as μεταξὺ θεοῦ τε καὶ θνητοῦ (202E), we are justified in identifying this anti-divine side with mortality, and in regarding ἡ Πενία as a personification of ἡ θνητὴ φύσις.⁹⁰

Bury further notes that “Plotinus is not far astray when he equates *πενία* with *ἕλη*, matter, potency.”⁹¹ Where Plotinus finds every aspect of the story of Eros’s birth to serve as a symbol with an underlying meaning, however, Bury counts the “incidental details of the allegory, such as ‘the garden of Zeus’” to be “merely put in for purposes of literary effect, to fill up and round off the story.”⁹²

Allen’s comments, directed against a heavily allegorical interpretation, indicate the more common attitude toward the myth:

The personification of Eros as a child of Poros and Penia is a fiction, its logical force requiring us to consider Eros as the lover qua lover, the lover just insofar as he loves. But there is an ancient tradition of interpretation, descended from Plotinus, which takes it as something more. Plotinus maintained that Eros is a substance (*οὐσία*), sprung from another substance but nevertheless a being in its own right, and the cause of the affection of love in the human soul (“On Love”, *Ennead* III 5. 3-4). Plotinus

⁹⁰Ibid., xl-xli.

⁹¹Ibid., xli, n.1.

⁹²Ibid., xli.

interpreted the myth of Poros and Penia as an allegory meant to represent metaphysical connections....⁹³

Allen's comments above agree with the commentaries of Dover and Rowe in treating the characters in the story of Eros's birth as personifications of forces or abstractions, rather than as indicating an underlying meaning or symbolizing an underlying metaphysical principle. A second point of agreement among the three commentators is the interpretation of this story in terms of what Allen calls its "logical force"; though we are not to understand the story as an allegory in which every detail symbolizes something else, we may discern Plato's meaning if we read the story as a rational account. The story may then be understood along the lines set out by Diotima in the subsequent passage; this shows that the story is not itself particularly important, and that Diotima's exposition of the tale contains its meaning. Such an interpretation avoids the difficulties involved with the role of myth in Platonic dialogues and the uncertainty involved with an allegorical interpretation that assigns objects or concepts to every identifiable symbol in the myth. It fails, however, to answer or even to raise the question of why Diotima tells a story at all and why she does so in this particular place.

The treatments of Bury, Allen, Rowe, and Dover point to a difficulty in understanding the theogonic account of Eros contained in Diotima's discourse. There is concern among these authors to distinguish Diotima's account from allegory, and this concern is, in some instances, so great that the account is not considered insofar as it is a myth or theogony either. But whether or not the account should be interpreted allegorically is an issue that is secondary to its status as myth. We must first determine

⁹³Allen, *Symposium*, 50.

whether and in what sense Diotima's account may be considered myth; only then can we address the issues involved with allegorical interpretation.

The difficulty of determining whether the passage in question should be designated a 'μῦθος' is due, in part, to the ambiguity of the term itself. In his study of Platonic myth, Moors notes that the meaning of the Greek term μῦθος is much broader than its usual English counterpart:

Myth, both for Plato and for the classical Greek mind, was a flexible commodity. The term μῦθος and related terms meaning myth-telling, myth-teller, myth-like, and so on, can stand either for a story—be it a story addressing the distant past or one which in some way addresses matters which cannot be verified sensually or are fantastic—or stand for little more than narration, saying, use of speech, word, or verbal expression (especially so, as we shall observe, in those usages of mythical terms by Plato which are garnered from Homer and from other poets).⁹⁴

The broad usage of the term μῦθος is noted also by Brisson, who notes further that “the meaning of μῦθος was modified according to the transformations which affected the vocabulary of terms relating to “say” and “speech” during a period of historical evolution which culminates with Plato.”⁹⁵ The comments of both authors reveal the very broad sense of μῦθος and the things that the term may designate, and support the inclusion of Diotima's theogonic account of Eros in the category of μῦθος.

The designation of a particular Platonic text as containing a μῦθος is further complicated by commentators who wish to distinguish clearly myth from allegory. This appears as a problem in the works of both Friedländer and Stewart.⁹⁶ The motivation

⁹⁴ Moors, 35.

⁹⁵ Brisson, *Plato the Mythmaker*, 7.

⁹⁶ Friedländer, vol. 1; Stewart, *The Myths of Plato*.

for distinguishing sharply between myth and allegory is rooted not only in the attempt to separate the neo-Platonic interpretation of Plato from Plato himself, but also in Plato's criticism of allegorical interpretations of myth found in his dialogues. It seems, however, to be a mistake to attempt to draw a clear line between myth and allegory in the works of Plato, and attempts to do so are complicated by the narrower modern sense of the English term 'allegory'. Today, we are inclined to think of an allegory as involving a one-to-one correspondence between the symbol in a story and the thing it symbolizes. This is, indeed, the sort of allegorical reading Plotinus provides of the *Symposium* in *Ennead* III.5. As Brisson notes, however, the term 'allegory' from the Greek ἀλληγορία is a later development; the term with which Plato is concerned, ὑπόνοια, has a broader connotation and does not necessarily indicate a one-to-one correspondence between symbol and thing.⁹⁷

The passages in which Plato rejects the allegorical interpretation of myth are well-known.⁹⁸ The first occurs in the *Republic*'s critique of myth,⁹⁹ and, as Rist rightly notes,

⁹⁷ "Although Plato rarely uses this word [ὑπόνοια], it is nonetheless very interesting. As J. Pépin points out, *huponoia* has a meaning which is later expressed by *allēgoria*. According to its etymology, *huponoia* is a substantive which corresponds to the verb *huponoiein*. Now, *huponoiein* (literally, "to see or to think beneath"), is simply to distinguish a (deep) hidden meaning behind the obvious (superficial) meaning of a discourse. The only two examples of *huponoiein* in the Platonic corpus confirm this definition" (Brisson, *Plato the Myth Maker*, 122).

⁹⁸ For a more detailed discussion of Plato's opinion regarding allegorical interpretation of myth see J. Tate, "Plato and Allegorical Interpretation," *The Classical Quarterly* 23, no. 3/4 (Jul. - Oct., 1929): 142-154 and *The Classical Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (Jan. 1930): 1-10; Ludwig Edelstein, "The Function Myth in Plato's Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 10, no. 4 (Oct. 1949): 463-481; Luc Brisson, *Plato the Myth Maker*, especially chapter 12.

⁹⁹ *Respublica* 2. 377c ff.

Plato's objection here "is not to the allegories themselves, for he never denies that the myths may have an "undersense" (*ὑπόνοια*), but is based on the fact that young people cannot distinguish what is allegorical and what is not, and are thus liable to be corrupted."¹⁰⁰ It is notable that it is in this same passage of the *Republic* that Plato advocates the view that the factual falsity of a myth is irrelevant, for though the story be unverifiable, it reveals the truth insofar as it reveals the true nature of gods, daimons, and heroes.¹⁰¹ It is this kind of factual falsity that is at issue in the second passage, from the *Phaedrus*, that is also cited as an example of Plato's rejection of the allegorical interpretation of myth. What Phaedrus requests from Socrates in this passage is first, confirmation that the place where they are walking is the place where "they say Boreas seized Orithyia from the river"¹⁰² and second, to know whether Socrates accepts the story as true.¹⁰³ Socrates responds as follows:

I should be quite in fashion if I disbelieved it, as the men of science do. I might proceed to give a scientific account of how the maiden, while at play with Pharmacia, was blown by a gust of Boreas down from the rocks hard by, and having thus met her death was said to have been seized by Boreas, though it may have happened on the Areopagus, according to another version of the occurrence. For my part, Phaedrus, I regard such theories as no doubt attractive, but as the invention of clever, industrious

¹⁰⁰ Rist, *Eros and Psyche*, 8.

¹⁰¹ "What kind of fiction do you mean? Said he. Nothing unprecedented, said I, but a sort of Phoenician tale, something that has happened ere now in many parts of the world, as the poets aver and have induced men to believe, but that has not happened and perhaps would not be likely to happen in our day and demanding no little persuasion to make it believable" (*Resp.* 3. 414c2-6). This view is in accord with that which Socrates espouses when he puts forward a grand eschatological myth.

¹⁰² *Phaedrus* 229b4.

¹⁰³ *Phdr.* 229c4.

people who are not exactly to be envied, for the simple reason that they must then go on and tell us the real truth about the appearance of centaurs and the Chimera, not to mention a whole host of such creatures, Gorgons and Pegasuses and countless other remarkable monsters of legend flocking in on them. If our skeptic, with his somewhat crude science, means to reduce every one of them to the standard of probability, he'll need a deal of time for it. I myself have certainly no time for the business, and I'll tell you why, my friend. I can't as yet 'know myself,' as the inscription at Delphi enjoins, and so long as that ignorance remains it seems to me ridiculous to inquire into extraneous matters.¹⁰⁴

As Rist notes, what Socrates objects to here is the “rationalizing of mythology”.¹⁰⁵ What the men of science seek is a means of explaining the origin of a myth by reducing personified forces, such as Boreas, to material forces, like wind. The persuasive force of the myth is removed, as is its instructive element, when the myth is thus reduced to an embellishment of the factual occurrence of a girl who unfortunately played too close to the water on a windy day and came to a bad end. Whether or not such an occurrence took place and on what spot is irrelevant; the point of the myth is not to relate factual truth.

There are, then, two distinct ways of erring with regard to “allegorical” interpretation of myth. The first is to assign symbolic import to every detail of a story, as, for example, Plotinus does in his interpretation of myth in the *Symposium*. In such an interpretation, the characters, objects, and events of the story are replaced by rational concepts, and the end result is the reduction of the meaning of the story to an array of rational concepts and explanations. The second is to reduce the story to material or factual elements, so that it has no meaning or import beyond its parts or its being a factual account. In this second case whether these events happened matters; the meaning of the

¹⁰⁴ *Phdr.* 229c5-230a3.

¹⁰⁵ Rist, 8.

event or story does not. In both instances, the problem is that the story has not been allowed to serve its educational end, which is to form the manner in which the soul undergoes pleasure and pain and to inculcate in the soul an ability to distinguish the truly fine from the base. If we take seriously the proposed educational system of the *Republic*, the rejection of the allegorical interpretation of myths makes good sense, for myths are supposed to educate the passions of the soul with regard to what is beautiful and fine, and this is accomplished, in part, by presenting the soul with models of the beautiful and fine that can be imitated. A rationalization of myth would thus defeat the purpose of myth itself. Edelstein describes this functioning of myth as follows:

The myth, shaped in accordance with reason, brings to the realm of the passions the light of the intellect; it instigates man to act with hope and confidence toward the goal which reason has set out before him. Through the myth the inner core of man's existence receives the commands of the intellect in terms that are adequate to its irrational nature. Thus man in his entirety is put under the guidance of philosophy....¹⁰⁶

Though the purpose of myth, as Edelstein describes it, is to guide and form the irrational element in human beings, this does not render the myth itself irrational, nor place it at odds with a rational account. As we shall see, the myth of Eros's origins that Diotima provides in the *Symposium* is a good example of how myth can function within rational discourse and contribute to it.

In order to understand the relationship between myth and the nonrational, we must bear in mind that there is more than one sense of the nonrational for Plato. There is, on the one hand, the irrational element of the soul, both the passions of the irrational appetites and of the *θυμός*. This is the nonrational that cannot attain the rational level; but

¹⁰⁶ Edelstein, 477.

there is also that which, like Beauty itself, is beyond rational, cannot be discovered by or explained in terms of linear, discursive reasoning, but must be grasped intuitively by *νοῦς*. In one sense, myth trains the “lower” irrational parts of man, but in another, it answers to the rational element in its highest dimension, at the level of *νοήσις* rather than *διάνοια*. Guthrie describes the role of myth with respect to this highest element in a comment on the *Seventh Letter*:

‘Whoever has followed this exploratory *mythos*’, concludes Plato (344d), ‘will know that if Dionysius or any lesser or greater man has written about the first and highest principles of reality (*physis*), he has not in my view heard or understood anything aright on the subject. Otherwise he would have revered these things as I do, and not exposed them to unfitting and unseemly treatment.’ It is curious that we should owe to such an angry outburst Plato’s only personal summing-up of his epistemological principles, yet so it appears to be. It is a *mythos* because the experience of intuiting the Fifth, the highest and most knowable Being, cannot be communicated literally, but only in metaphor—here the metaphor of spark and flame. Plato has never hesitated to admit the existence of truths which outrun the resources of dialectical procedure. In the *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus* immortality can be demonstrated, but the details of life out of the body and of transmigration can only be reflected in mythical form. The nature of the soul is a reality of this kind: one cannot say what it *is*, only what it resembles (*phdr.* 246a).¹⁰⁷

This conception that myth goes beyond rational discourse, to capture what cannot be conveyed through dialectic, is a feature of the interpretations given by both Friedländer and Stewart. In his work on the myths of Plato, J. A. Stewart argues that “Myth is an organic part of the Platonic Drama, not an added ornament...but the Platonic Myth is not illustrative—it is not Allegory rendering pictorially results already obtained by argument.”¹⁰⁸ Rather, Stewart suggests, the myth carries the argument of the dialogue to

¹⁰⁷ Guthrie, *History*, 5: 411-12.

¹⁰⁸ Stewart, 24-5.

a new level, one that could not have been attained in any other manner.¹⁰⁹ Friedländer too recognizes this as a feature of Plato's use of myth, but distinguishes different uses of myth both within individual dialogues and in the historical stages of Plato's work. He recognizes three levels or divisions, and argues that the first two of these are present within the *Symposium* itself, distinguishing the mythical accounts included in the earlier speeches in the *Symposium* from the mythical account in Diotima's speech. These he designates as pre-Socratic and Socratic, respectively:

All these speeches represent mythology on the first level. This does not mean they are nothing but delightfully meaningless play. Would Plato have written them down if they were? And are there not sufficient hints in them of what is genuinely Platonic? The over-all impression, to be sure, is as if they "mythologized" into the blue, and no distinction is made between what is to be retained and what is to be discarded. When Socrates begins to speak, all the earlier speeches collapse as "illusory." For they preceded conceptual discourse; and such a procedure, according to Socrates, is a poor substitute for *Logos* and truth. In Socrates' speech, the fairy tale about the procreation of Eros by Poros (Plenty) and Penia (Poverty) is, in itself, not so different from the previous tales; yet it is most important to appreciate the changed setting. Socrates first clarified the nature of love in rational, conceptual discourse, defining the most important aspects. Love is love of something, namely of beauty. Love is a desire and a want. Love wishes to possess what it lacks. This is the

¹⁰⁹ While this point is correct, Stewart characterizes this new level in terms of prophesy and dream-world consciousness, both of which are rather dubious, not to mention vague characterizations of this new level, why Plato sees it as necessary, and the role of the myth within the dialogue as a whole. Stewart writes "in the Myths put into his mouth Socrates *prophesies*—sets forth, by the aid of imaginative language, the fundamental conditions of conduct and knowledge" (25).

"We have seen that in form every story of the dream-world, to whichever of the three classes it belongs, is anthropological and zoological; that it is about the adventures and doings of people and animals—men and men-like beasts and gods; and that it is intrinsically interesting as a story, and receives belief, or, at any rate, make-believe. We must now add that it has no moral—i.e. the teller and his hearers do not think of anything but the story itself. This is the criterion of Myth as distinguished from Allegory or Parable: Myth has no moral or other meaning in the minds of those who make it, and of those for whom it is made" (38-39).

“truth,” before which all previous speeches with their mythical tales vanish. Altogether different is the Socratic myth, which now follows; it is not a will-o’-the-wisp in empty space—at best, an accidental hint pointing toward the truth; at worst confusing play—but continues upon the lines just drawn by the *Logos*.¹¹⁰

Thus, for Friedländer, the account of Eros’s birth is a part of the whole *λόγος* being offered by Diotima; the account is a further development in the explanation of the nature of Eros. The use of dialectic as a prelude to myth allows myth to move beyond the bounds of reason. The relationship between *μῦθος* and *λόγος* that Friedländer describes lies at a point between the two erroneous interpretations of myth discussed above; myth does not have to be allegorical in order to be part of the *λόγος*; nor ought it be reduced to the rational or verifiable concepts it is taken to contain or represent. The fact that myth cannot be reduced to rational explanation of one kind or another, however, does not mean that it is irrational. It is perhaps more properly designated as transrational, for it embodies truths that cannot be conveyed through dialectic in a form accessible to the rational soul, answering to the affectivity of the rational element.

This ability of myth to communicate that which eludes rational discourse is the same ability Hannah Arendt attributes to metaphorical thinking; myth is, indeed, a kind of metaphorical thinking.¹¹¹ Arendt describes the capacity of metaphors to serve as a

¹¹⁰Friedländer, 1: 179-80.

¹¹¹The term myth appears only five times in the entirety of Arendt’s two volume work *The Life of the Mind*, and one of these occurs in titles of works she cites. Nonetheless, her analysis of metaphorical thinking upon which I draw here continually analyzes the relationship between sensible images and intellectual meaning, in much the same manner as Plato himself uses images to convey intellectual meaning in Diotima’s description of Eros. Further support for such a usage of Arendt’s thought here is found in her own use of Bruno Snell’s chapter “From Myth to Logic: the Role of the Comparison” in *The Discovery of the Mind* (New York, Evanston: Harper Torchbooks, 1960). Additionally, as the reader may have already noted, the investigations of this chapter have established (1)

bridge between the world of sense and the world of thought. “No language,” she writes, “has a ready-made vocabulary for the needs of mental activity: they all borrow their vocabulary from words originally meant to correspond either to sense experience or to other experiences of ordinary life.”¹¹² In Diotima’s myth in the *Symposium*, this appropriation of everyday experience for the sake of illuminating spiritual phenomena is immediately apparent; Eros is the child of Πόρος and Πενία, and the description of his nature in relation to his parents describes both the poverty (πενία) of the day-laborer and his resourcefulness (πόρος) that springs from and is inseparable from his poverty. The concrete image of the day-laborer, the physical hardships and deficiencies he endures, his constant motion in pursuit of resources, serve as metaphors for the spiritual, emotional, and rational aspects of human experience.

that the term *μῦθος* has much broader scope in Greek than it does in modern English, on that is inclusive of metaphor; and (2) that the mythical elements of the *Symposium* discussed here are never designated as myth by Plato himself, and his use of imagery here more closely resembles metaphor than myth narrowly construed. It might be objected that my use of Arendt here is at odds with the view of myth she expresses in the essay, “What is Authority?” In this essay, Arendt writes of the myth of Er that it is “a myth which Plato himself obviously neither believed nor wanted the philosophers to believe” (Hannah Arendt, “What is Authority?” in *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 108). The reason for her view that Plato does not believe in the literal truth of his own myths is clarified in the next sentence, where she writes “What the allegory of the cave story in the middle of the *Republic* is for the few or for the philosopher the myth of hell at the end is for the many who are not capable of philosophical truth” (Ibid.). It can be safely concluded from the context of Arendt’s remarks here that she is not expressing a view that applies to all myths in the Platonic corpus. Furthermore, she here recognizes the distinction between the literal truth of myth and the metaphorical sense, the latter of which she clearly holds to be the conveyor of truth for Plato. In the section of *The Life of the Mind* on which I draw here, it is this latter sense that she propounds.

¹¹² Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. 1, *Thinking* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 102.

If Arendt's analysis of metaphor is correct, then the attempt to find a one-to-one correspondence between symbol and concept is a mistake; the metaphor is not meant to point through symbol to thing but through visible relation to invisible relation, and to unite the sensible and intelligible. The myth of Eros's origins and the description of the Eros-daimon, in this sense, are the sensible depictions of the movements and struggles of the human soul. The relationship Eros has to Poverty and Resource is set out in physical, sensible terms in order to make visible this same triadic relationship as it exists in the soul. The relation is that of the simultaneous possession of poverty and abundance, as ultimately conveyed at the pinnacle of the lover's ascent to the Beautiful by the term *αφθονος*. Both myth and daimon indicate the mean, in the geometric sense, that allows for the unification of the extremes.¹¹³ The different aspects of Eros do not serve as symbols for concepts or things, but as elucidations of the concept of Eros itself, by depicting its internal distinctions.

As Arendt's analysis shows, myth need not be allegorized to be made intelligible, but because myth is metaphorical, it is tempting to treat it as allegory in the narrow sense discussed above. As we have seen however, the term '*μῦθος*' has a very broad designation, and since Plato himself associates myth with intuitive comprehension it seems advisable to eschew an allegorical interpretation of Diotima's myth in the *Symposium*. The myths in the *Symposium* in particular are used by the encomiasts to provide a genealogical account of Eros, and this account of his lineage stands as the foundation for his great works; he who is of good birth produces good things. The

¹¹³ Simone Weil, *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks* (London and New York: Routledge, 1957; digital-print edition, 2005), 202-204.

relationship between the theogonies of Eros and the works attributed to him provides further insight into the role of myth in Diotima's account, for she too makes use of Eros's origins to explain his works and effects. The next section will examine the role of myth in the *Symposium*, with special attention to the relationship between the theogonies of Eros and his effects.

Mythology in the Symposium

As we have seen, the very broad designation of the term *μῦθος* allows for the inclusion of the account of Eros's origins as an instance of myth. It is further notable that the subject of the *Symposium* itself places the reader quite squarely in the domain of myth, since Eros is a figure in popular and traditional myth and he is identified as a god to whom praise should be given at the beginning of the dialogue. Though there is only one occurrence of the term *μῦθος* in the *Symposium* itself (in a comment made by Erixymachus at 177a3-4),¹¹⁴ every speech delivered in the dialogue makes use of some sort of myth, either by alluding to the events and personages of well-known stories, or by

¹¹⁴ Erixymachus here quotes a line from Euripides, “οὐ γὰρ ἐμὸς ὁ μῦθος”, in order to indicate that the story he will tell, and the complaint against the poets for failing to adequately praise Eros, belongs properly to Phaedrus. It is perhaps notable that Socrates' second speech in the *Phaedrus* begins in a somewhat similar fashion, quoting a line from Stesichorus “Οὐκ ἔστ' ἔτυμος λόγος οὔτος” (*Phaedrus* 243a8). Socrates has been compelled by Phaedrus to speak falsely of Eros and in the second speech recants and makes a new speech as a *κάθαρσις* for this sin against mythology. Erixymachus in the *Symposium*, though not guilty of having spoken falsely, cites Phaedrus as the source of his proposal that encomia be given in honor of Eros. This has the effect of presenting the speeches that follow Phaedrus's own as responses to him, and this effect is emphasized further if we bear in mind Brisson's note that Phaedrus had been denounced in the summer of 415 for having parodied the Eleusinian mysteries (Brisson, *Le Banquet*, 21).

drawing on myths to provide an account of Eros's parentage.¹¹⁵ Elements of myth, and so also religion, are found throughout the dialogue and mythical accounts that are found wanting are revised and corrected in Diotima's discourse. The prominence of mythical elements in the dialogue, along with Diotima's thorough correction of her predecessors, indicate that the mythical elements in the dialogue are significant to understanding Plato's account of Eros.

Further evidence for the importance of myth in the *Symposium* is provided by the uniqueness of the subject-matter; the inclusion of myth in every speech; the use of myth to establish the nature of Eros and, on the basis of this nature, to prescribe action; the use of language and imagery of mystery religions, which are founded on myths; and the presence of a priestess who appropriates the language and ritual of mystery religions in order to describe the proper path (*ὁρθῶν ὁδός*) to the final revelation of Eros, the vision of Beauty.

Properly speaking, the "myth" of Eros's origins in the *Symposium* is a theogony, and its presence in Diotima's discourse is consistent not only with the theogonies provided in the speeches given by the other speakers in the *Symposium*, but also with the form and practice of encomia.¹¹⁶ The fact that the theogonies of Eros offered in the *Symposium* appear quite properly as a consequence of the practice of encomia may

¹¹⁵ *Symposium* 178a5-c1 (Phaedrus); 179b4-180b6 (Phaedrus); 180d4-e4 (Pausanias); 187d5-e5 (Erixymachus); 189d1-191d3 (Aristophanes); 195a5-e5 (Agathon).

¹¹⁶ "In the traditional manner of encomia, Phaedrus begins by describing Eros's excellence of birth: Eros is a god and, along with Earth, eldest of all gods except Chaos; this is attested by ancient tradition" (Allen, *Symposium*, 12). Dover also notes that the traditional encomia included praising the good lineage of the subject of the encomia (*Symposium*, 11-12).

appear to suggest that these mythical elements of the dialogue are neither remarkable nor significant. In point of fact, however, the several theogonies offered serve to emphasize the centrality of myth in the dialogue as a whole, for their presence repeatedly draws attention to the mythical being at the center of the discourse: Eros. No other Platonic dialogue takes for its primary subject a divine or semi-divine being.

Friedländer argues that the language of myth itself is significant in understanding Plato's import in this passage:

It would be a mistake to take—as one might be tempted to do—the story about Penia and Poros as an allegorical symbol for the rational concept of *metaxy*. As soon as Diotima begins to speak through the ‘demonic’ Socrates, Eros is present as a ‘great demon,’ and we are in a mythical realm. And the *metaxy* itself is seen just as much from a mythical as from a rational perspective referring to the cosmos, which ‘is bound together with itself’ through this demonic realm.¹¹⁷

Friedländer's comments draw attention to the importance of the mythical elements in the *Symposium*, and emphasize that part of the meaning of myth is lost if it is allegorized away. This is, in part, because the myth serves as one among other indications to the reader that the account given by Diotima is in the “mythical” realm, and this draws attention to another important facet of the language of the dialogue, namely its liberal use of religious language, imagery, and allusion. Myth, while part of the historical and literary traditions of Greece, was also alive in the religious practice of the time. Indeed, the myths regarding the divinities at the centers of the cults of Orpheus, Dionysus, and Demeter, may be seen as the foundation for the religious rituals of these cults and for the practices and ways of life adopted by the adherents to these cults. The orgiastic frenzies

¹¹⁷ Friedländer, 1: 108.

involved with celebrations of Dionysus involve celebrants in the tearing apart and dismemberment of small animals, and these animals symbolize Dionysus himself, and his dismemberment by the Titans.¹¹⁸ The tympanum used to accompany dance is made from stretching the hide of such an animal across the frame, and so the drum itself points back to the events of the death of Dionysus. The rituals surrounding Demeter include the sacrifice of pigs because “when Demeter’s daughter sank into the earth, the pigs of the swineherd Eubouleus were swallowed up as well.”¹¹⁹ The rituals surrounding individual gods and goddesses are incarnations of the stories of these gods and goddesses. This connection between myth and ritual is also evident in the speeches given in the *Symposium*, as each of the speakers makes use of myth first to describe the nature of Eros and then, based on this, to recommend action and practice in erotic matters. The works and actions of Eros flow from his nature, and the followers of Eros, possessed by him, are like him in nature and action.

Phaedrus, citing Hesiod, Acusilaus, and Parmenides, identifies Eros as among the oldest of the gods.¹²⁰ From the evidence of these authors, Phaedrus concludes that Eros

¹¹⁸ There are variations of the Dionysus myth. For a brief account of the different stories surrounding Dionysus, see Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, 2 vols. (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1955; reprint 1957) or Mark P. O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardon, *Classical Mythology*, 7th edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), especially chapter 13. More detailed considerations of Dionysus and the developments in the cult of Dionysus can be found in W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and their Gods* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950; digital-print edition, 2001); Jane Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903; reprint, New York: Meridian Books, 1955), and Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, translated by John Raffan (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1985).

¹¹⁹ Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 243.

¹²⁰ *Symp.* 178a5-c2.

has no parents, since he is himself one of the original gods. The theogonies that Phaedrus cites identify Earth, Chaos, and Eros as the oldest beings in the cosmos, and the origins of all else. From the venerability of Eros's age Phaedrus derives the venerability of Eros's gifts to humankind; Eros gives the greatest gifts to humans because he is one of the oldest deities. The honor that belongs to the aged, to the traditional, to those descended from honorable families, is akin to the honor that those possessed by Eros pursue. The gift of Eros, in Phaedrus's account, is thus the inspiration to act honorably. It is by the inspiration of Eros that men who want to live well do so:

What it is that should guide human beings who mean to live well, in their whole lives: this, nothing—not kinship, or public honours, or wealth, or anything else—is capable of implanting so well as love can. What is it that I refer to? The feeling of shame at shameful things, and love of honour in the case of fine ones; without these it is impossible for either a city or an individual to enact great and fine actions.¹²¹

We do not learn of Eros's parentage, but that he is himself venerable because he is himself an origin. As honorable himself, Eros serves as the inspiration to love honor. Phaedrus's account is, in many respects, a superficial one, but the relationship between the origins of Eros and the practices that Eros inspires is clear enough. It is Eros that makes us feel shame or pride as a consequence of our actions, and so Eros that causes us to love honor and cultivate virtue in ourselves.

Phaedrus ends his speech as he began, by drawing from traditional mythology; but his latter use of mythology is designed to give concrete examples of the work that Eros accomplishes in human beings. The most enduring of honorable actions are those

¹²¹ *Symp.* 178c5-d4. ὁ γὰρ χρηὸν ἀνθρώποις ἡγεῖσθαι παντὸς τοῦ βίου τοῖς μέλλουσι καλῶς βιώσεσθαι, τοῦτο οὔτε συγγένεια οἷα τε ἐμποιεῖν οὔτω καλῶς οὔτε τιμαὶ οὔτε πλοῦτος οὔτ' ἄλλο οὐδὲν ὡς ἔρωσ. λέγω δὲ δὴ τί τοῦτο; τὴν ἐπὶ μὲν τοῖς αἰσχροῖς αἰσχύνην, ἐπὶ δὲ τοῖς καλοῖς φιλοτιμίαν· οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἄνευ τούτων οὔτε πόλιν οὔτε ἰδιώτην μεγάλα καὶ καλὰ ἔργα ἐξεργάζεσθαι.

preserved in mythical accounts, like those of Alcestis and Orpheus, who both acted from Eros. By this latter use of myth, Phaedrus gives a further prescriptive account of the proper use of Eros, and this is captured in his concluding words:

So it is that I declare Love oldest of gods, and most honoured, and with most power when it comes to the acquisition of virtue and happiness by human beings, both in life and after they have ended it.¹²²

Pausanias, immediately following Phaedrus, corrects Phaedrus's theogony and his explanation of it; not only has Phaedrus failed to distinguish between Heavenly and Vulgar Eros, he has also failed to distinguish the beautiful and shameful practices (*πρᾶξις*) attendant upon each.¹²³ Though Pausanias proposes a genealogy different from that of Phaedrus, it is still grounded in traditional Greek mythology. In the accounts of Pausanias and Erixymachus, the distinction between heavenly and earthly Eros serves as the foundation for the actions and dispositions proper to each type of Eros. Pausanias, after distinguishing between the two kinds of Eros, states that

Every action (*πρᾶξις*) is like this: when done, in and by itself it is neither fine nor shameful. So for example with what we are doing now: Whether we drink, or sing, or talk to each other, none of these things is in itself fine, but rather the manner in which it is done is what determines how it turns out, in the doing of it; if it is done in a fine way, and correctly, it becomes fine, and if incorrectly, shameful. This is how it is with loving and with Love: not all of Love is fine, or a worthy object of encomium—only the Love who impels us to love in a fine way.¹²⁴

¹²² *Symp.* 180b6-8.

¹²³ *Symp.* 180c1-181a6.

¹²⁴ *Symp.* 180e4-181a6. *πᾶσα γὰρ πρᾶξις ᾧδ' ἔχει· αὐτή ἐφ' ἑαυτῆς πραπτομένη οὔτε καλή οὔτε αἰσχρά. οἷον ὁ νῦν ἡμεῖς ποιούμεν, ἢ πίνειν ἢ ἄδειν ἢ διαλέγεσθαι, οὐκ ἔστι τούτων αὐτὸ καλὸν οὐδὲν, ἀλλ' ἐν τῇ πράξει, ὡς ἂν πραχθῆ, τοιοῦτον ἀπέβη· καλῶς μὲν γὰρ πραπτομενον καὶ ὀρθῶς καλὸν γίγνεται, μὴ ὀρθῶς δὲ αἰσχρόν. οὕτω δὴ καὶ τὸ ἐρᾶν καὶ ὁ Ἔρως οὐ πᾶς ἔστι καλὸς οὐδὲ ἄξιος ἐγκωμιάζεσθαι, ἀλλὰ ὁ καλῶς προτρέπων ἐρᾶν.*

One loves in a fine way when one loves with a view to inculcating virtue in the beloved; and the beloved behaves well insofar as he yields for the sake of gaining in wisdom and virtue, even if this is not the ultimate consequence of his yielding. Pausanius's account holds that one loves well when one loves what is lasting, i.e., character of soul rather than beauty of body; when one loves character rather than body, one is not seeking merely or primarily sexual gratification, but rather to guide the beloved in order to make him virtuous. Heavenly Eros serves as the foundation for prescribed action in both of these senses, it identifies the appropriate object of love, character, and it describes how one should act with respect to this object, i.e., with a view to inculcating excellence.

Pausanius's distinction between Heavenly and Vulgar Eros is taken up by Erixymachus, who uses it to explain the physician's art as consisting in the establishment of good or heavenly Eros in the body. For Erixymachus, the two kinds of Eros are not distinguished by their respective objects or the manner in which one loves the object; rather, good Eros designates the proper proportion of various opposites in the body, and the balance of these opposites results in the harmony that, in the body, is called health. Bad or vulgar Eros, according to this account, is imbalance and lack of harmony. The physician is able to transform bad Eros into good Eros by the proper amount of filling up and emptying.¹²⁵ Erixymachus, adopting Pausanius's distinction between fine and

¹²⁵ *Symp.* 186c5-d5. There is much that is noteworthy in Erixymachus's account. The language of filling and emptying, *πλήρωσις* and *κένωσις*, is similar to that of *Republic IX*'s discussion of pleasure and pain; the portrayal of good Eros as "reasonable" and bad Eros as "unreasonable" is similar to the Eros of the nonlover and true lover in the *Phaedrus*. Similar, too, is the *Phaedo*'s suggestion that "rational" or human moderation is not true moderation, for it merely balances and measures pleasures against one another. All of these similarities to a balance or harmony that focuses on the gratification of physical desires and ignores or denies the nobler and more substantial desires of the spirit and the mind indicate that the account given by Erixymachus is incomplete because it cannot

shameful Eros, identifies fine Eros as order and concord, and shameful Eros as disorder and discord. Where fine and beautiful Eros is found, things are in a good state and flourishing; this truth applies not only to the bodies of human beings, but to all of nature. Eros functions in a variety of arts and crafts as the power that establishes and maintains order and concord. Knowledge of the medical art, according to Erixymachus, is the knowledge that allows the physician to distinguish between good and bad Eros and also to cause good Eros by the restoration of order and concord in instances when this has been disrupted.¹²⁶

The same theme as before comes back again: that it is the people who are orderly that one must gratify, and in such a way that those who are not yet orderly might become more so, and it is these people's love that should be cherished, and this is the beautiful Love, the heavenly one, the one who belongs to the Heavenly Muse; the other one, the common one, belongs to Polymnia, and he must be applied with caution to those to whom one applies him, in order that the pleasure he brings may be enjoyed, but that he may implant no tendency to immorality, just as in the sphere of my own expertise it is a considerable task to deal properly with desires

distinguish between the truly fine and beautiful and the base and ugly. Xenophon's *Symposium* portrays a similar shortcoming in the character of Antisthenes, whose poverty fails to be guided by Eros because though he has just the right amount of things, he has them in a way that fails to appreciate their worth or to distinguish the truly fine from the base.

¹²⁶ Included among crafts whose power depends upon instilling good Eros in its subjects are gymnastics, agriculture, music, astronomy, and the mantic art. Of particular interest is the province of the seer, which according to Erixymachus, includes "all sacrifices" deals with "the mutual relationship of gods and men, are concerned with nothing other than cherishing or curing Love. For all impiety tends to arise when one does not gratify the orderly Love, or honour him and give him pride of place in everything one does, but the other one, in relation both to parents, living or dead, and to the gods; it is for just these things that the seer is enjoined to examine those who are in love and to cure them, and the seer's expertise, in its turn, is a craftsmanship of friendship between gods and men because of its knowledge of matters of human love, that is, those that aim at right and piety" (*Symp.* 188b7-d3).

relating to the expertise of the cook, so that the pleasure may be enjoyed without ill effects.¹²⁷

Good Eros prescribes, once again, a way of life, that of balance and moderation. Where there is order, balance, and moderation, there is health.

Aristophanes' account is singular in many respects. He discards the theogonies of his predecessors, choosing instead to give an account describing the fall of humanity from a better and more perfect existence to its current imperfect state, which is the cause of the human experience of Eros. This, in itself, sets Aristophanes' account apart, for he is the first of the speakers to ground his explanation of Eros in humanity rather than divinity. Nonetheless, Aristophanes' explanation utilizes traditional myth by alluding to a Homeric account of the fall of humanity that arises from impiety,¹²⁸ and also bears a resemblance to the account of the different ages of humanity found in Hesiod's *Works and Days*.¹²⁹ At any rate, the suggestion that the broken and incomplete nature of humanity is a consequence of divine punishment for impiety yields an account of Eros that, while still within the realm of myth and grounded in the mythical traditions of Greece, is singular in advancing a definition of Eros as internal to human nature.¹³⁰ There is very little discussion of Eros insofar as he is a god, but instead an exhortation to behave piously so that the gods will assist us in finding our complements and once again achieving wholeness:

¹²⁷ *Symp.* 187d4-e6.

¹²⁸ *Symp.* 190b5-d6.

¹²⁹ Hesiod *Opera et Dies* 1. 92-200.

¹³⁰ *Symp.* 191c9-d4, 192e9-193a1.

The way to happiness for the human race would be if our love were to run its full course and each of us were to find our own beloved, returning to our original nature. If this is what is best for us, necessarily what is closest to this among the things presently available to us must also be best; and this is to find a beloved with a nature congenial to oneself—and if we are to hymn the god who is responsible for that, we should justly hymn Love, who both provides us with the greatest benefits in the present by leading us to what belongs to us, and accords us the greatest hopes for the future, that if we for our part accord piety to the gods, he will establish us in our original condition and, by healing us, make us blessed and happy.¹³¹

The account of humanity as having fallen from a prior, more perfect state falls still within the category of myth, but less easily within the category of theogony. Nonetheless, insofar as this myth is intended to give an account of the origin, and thus in some sense the lineage, of Eros, it serves as a kind of theogony. Though Aristophanes gives an account of Eros in terms of its human origin, he ends his account with an exhortation to his audience to behave piously lest the human race suffer further punishment for defiance of the gods. His tale thus also prescribes action on the basis of the mythical account of Eros he has given.

Agathon's speech, like Aristophanes', departs from the structure adopted by earlier speakers, but maintains the relationship between the nature of the god himself with the effects he produces in humans. At the outset of his speech, Agathon states that he will speak first of the character of Eros and then of his gifts to humans, though he does not, as the first three speakers, appeal to accounts of Eros's origins to begin his speech. Nonetheless, Agathon pointedly rejects Phaedrus's theogony on the grounds that the gods would never have behaved in the fashion described by Phaedrus "if Love had been there

¹³¹ *Symp.* 193c3-d5.

among them".¹³² On these grounds, supplemented by the observation that Eros is always found among the young, Agathon argues that Eros is among the youngest, rather than the oldest, of the gods.

Though Agathon speaks at length about the nature of Eros based upon his observable manifestations among human beings, and draws upon the Greek literary tradition to provide support for his characterization, he never gives a positive account of Eros's origins. His theogony, insofar as he gives one, is given by the negation of the positive accounts that he rejects. The positive account of Eros's nature is drawn in part from the works of other poets, and his citations of great tragic poets, such as Euripides, Sophocles, and Homer, indicate that he views tragic poetry as the source of truth regarding the mythical portrayal of the gods.¹³³ His rejection of the Hesiodic tradition, however, indicates that he views tragic poetry not only as the source of truth, but also as the purveyor of truth; the tragic poet is the authority on myth, in its transmission, interpretation, and creation. Unlike the first three speakers of the dialogue who make use of already established tradition to ground what they say about Eros's nature, Agathon cites others' accounts only after he has described the nature of Eros. He begins with a description of the nature of Eros, and the mythological descriptions he subsequently utilizes reflect this initial description of Eros as young, beautiful, delicate, and soft. Like Aristophanes, Agathon creates his own account of Eros, making liberal use of the Greek poetic tradition to support his creation.

¹³² *Symp.* 195c4-6.

¹³³ Given the absence of citations from comic poets, we might also conclude that the tragic poets are properly those who should pronounce on the nature and activities of the gods.

Though Agathon's account differs in many respects from the previous speeches, the principle underlying the relationship between Eros and his followers remains the same, for all of the speakers describe the followers or initiates of Eros as becoming or being like Eros himself. Thus, we find in Agathon's statement "that Love, being himself first most beautiful and best, is then responsible for others' possession of things of this sort";¹³⁴ Eros is the cause of beauty and excellence in others because he is the primary instance of beauty and excellence. Like his predecessors, Agathon concludes his speech with an exhortation to follow Eros, and thus become like him:

He is the one who empties us of estrangement and fills us with kinship, causing us to come together in all such gatherings as ours, acting as guide in festivals, when choruses perform, at sacrifices; bringing gentleness, excluding savagery; generous with good will, miserly with ill will; gracious, kind; a spectacle for the wise, admired by the gods; coveted by those without portion of him, prized by those with a portion; father of delicacy, daintiness, luxuriance, charms, desire, longing; caring for good, uncaring of bad; in trouble, in fear, in longing, in speaking, a steersman, defender, fellow-soldier and saviour without peer, ornament at once of all gods and all men, most beautiful and best guide, whom everyone must follow, hymning him beautifully, sharing in the song he sings to charm the mind of all gods and men.¹³⁵

Throughout the speeches we have considered thus far, we have discerned a relationship between the theogonic account of Eros and the practices and behaviors that Eros inspires. It is not merely that the origins of Eros indicate his nature and so prescribe action; it is also the case that the followers of Eros become like the god himself or, if you will, being possessed by Eros, are led to become like him; they, being possessed by Eros, are manifestations of the god dwelling within them. Similarly, Diotima's portrayal of the

¹³⁴ *Symp.* 197c1-4.

¹³⁵ *Symp.* 197d1-e5.

Eros-daimon, provides a very “human” picture of Eros; the images she uses to depict Eros in his birth and life call to mind a specifically human existence and a concretely human experience. This human manifestation of Eros is reiterated in Alcibiades’ depiction of Socrates and echoes the description of Socrates given in the introductory portion of the *Symposium*.

Diotima’s theogonic account begins when Socrates asks who are the mother and father of Eros; she replies that it will take a long time to set out in detail, but she will tell him anyway (εἶρω).¹³⁶ The first verb, διηγέομαι, means “to set out in detail or describe in full”, the second verb, εἶρω, means to say or tell.¹³⁷ The myth of Eros’s parentage thus begins as a saying or telling, and one that will be thorough. This is a clear indication that what is to follow is not a story to be glossed over as mere literary embellishment, but an important development within the full account of the nature of eros. It further suggests, that while the account may be made sense of allegorically, it cannot be reduced to such an interpretation, since the “myth” begins the effort to set out the nature of Eros *in detail*. It seems from this that we should take quite seriously the account of Eros’s nature given here as central to understanding Plato’s conception of eros.

The placement of the myth within the conversation between Diotima and Socrates also emphasizes its significance. The account of Eros’s origins is offered as a second

¹³⁶ *Symp.* 203b1. Μακρότερον μὲν, ἔφη, διηγέσασθαι· ὅμως δέ σοι εἶρω.

¹³⁷ In *Plato the Myth Maker*, Brisson includes ‘διηγέομαι’ among the terms associated with myth-making and myth-telling in the Platonic dialogues. “Finally, the verbs *diēgeomai*, “to set out in detail,” and *dierkhomai*, “to go through to the end,” include, thanks to their second elements, respectively *hēgeomai*, “to go before, lead the way,” and *erkhomai*, “to go,” the idea of movement which *legō* conveys in its meaning of “telling.” The verbal prefix *dia-* further indicates the completeness of the movement in question”(57).

stage in Diotima's speech; it follows immediately upon Diotima's examination of Socrates, which has established the nature of Eros as intermediate, as daimon, and as bound to the concepts of desire and lack. This first stage of Diotima's discourse ends with the proclamation that one who is wise with regard to things of the daimon-world—the world of Eros—is a *δαιμόνιος ἀνὴρ*, and it is implied that this is something for which one should strive. The nature of Eros as intermediate, daimon, bound to desire and lack prepares the reader for Diotima's account of his origins and reappears in her explanation of the significance of his origins for understanding Eros's nature.

The myth itself departs from traditional theogonic accounts of Eros, presenting him as the child of *Πόρος* and *Πενία*, while nodding to tradition by placing his conception on Aphrodite's birthday.¹³⁸ Diotima's myth serves as a correction to the accounts that were offered by earlier speakers, and, in the course of her speech as a whole she corrects each of these earlier accounts. But Diotima's myth and speech do not merely correct the accounts of Eros offered in previous speeches; rather, she incorporates aspects of Eros from previous speeches that are in accord with her own, while correcting those aspects that she deems incorrect. Though it is beyond the scope of the current study to examine every instance of this phenomenon, one example will, perhaps, illuminate what Diotima does and why these corrections are so crucial to understanding the account of Eros put forward in the *Symposium*.

¹³⁸ *Symp.* 203b2-3.

In her conversation with Socrates, Diotima refers to “a story that’s told, according to which those who seek the other half of themselves who are in love,”¹³⁹ and continues to correct this story, saying:

But my story declares that love is neither of a half nor of a whole, unless, my friend, it turns out actually to be good, since people are even willing to have their own feet and hands cut off, if their own state seems to them to be a bad one. For it’s not, I think, what it their own that either group is embracing, except if someone calls what is good ‘what belongs to’ him, and ‘his own’, and what is bad ‘alien’; since there is nothing else that people are in love with except the good.¹⁴⁰

The reference to a story in which lovers long for their other halves is clearly a reference to the story of Aristophanes.¹⁴¹ But Diotima does not completely reject the points raised by Aristophanes, as she recognizes that the soul does long for something that belongs to it, something of which it is in need and to which it may once have been joined. It is perhaps even accurate to say that the absence the soul experiences in longing for its beloved object is the absence of the realm of the Forms, which are most like the soul itself and, in their goodness and beauty, the delight of the soul. The remarks Diotima makes in the above passage do more than allude to and correct Aristophanes; they provide a more complete understanding of Eros itself and foreshadow Diotima’s description of the soul’s ascent to the vision of Beauty. So it is with each of the preceding speeches; not only does Diotima correct and revise her predecessors, she incorporates aspects of their theories into her own; the result is that Diotima’s account is fuller and more complete, since it has included within it all of the aspects of Eros

¹³⁹*Symp.* 205d10-e1.

¹⁴⁰ *Symp.* 205e1-206a1.

¹⁴¹ Cf. *Symp.* 191c8-d3, 192b6-c5, 192e9-193a1.

considered in the previous speeches, and added to them what was lacking. This helps us to understand Diotima's meaning better, but also helps us to understand that the earlier speeches of the *Symposium* provide the foundations for Diotima's speech, each contributing something to the whole as it is presented by Diotima. This relationship between the theogonies offered in the earlier speeches and that offered by Diotima also underscores the importance of theogony in understanding the nature of Eros.

Diotima's myth of Eros does not stand out as something merely added to the dialogue to incorporate a theogony. Rather, it grows out of the discourse that immediately precedes it, and incorporates the concepts of intermediacy, intentionality, and deficiency. Eros, in this tale, is intermediate not only as daimon, but also by virtue of his origins, so that he is understood as comprising *Πόρος* (resourcefulness, way) and *Πενία* (poverty) in his intermediacy; it is thus that the account of his origins establishes the relationship among Eros, *Πόρος*, and *Πενία*.

Πόρος, often translated as "resource" has a rather more dynamic sense to it, for as Guthrie notes, it means "'finding a way', resourcefulness".¹⁴² Weil notes that "*πόρος* is the origin of the verbs *πόρω* and *πορίζω*, literally to open the way, but above all to procure, to supply, to give."¹⁴³ It is, indeed, reminiscent of the verbs used to describe the daimonic activity of Eros in the preceding passage of Diotima's speech, i.e. *διαπορδμεύω* and *ἐρμηνεύω*, which indicate the active nature of Eros as providing a path from the human to the divine. This sense of *πόρος* is also noted by Dover, who writes:

¹⁴² Guthrie, *History*, 4: 375, n.1.

¹⁴³ Weil, *Intimations*, 127.

πόρος, etymologically cognate with *πείρειν* ‘pierce’, is applied to any means (e.g. a path or a ferry) of getting across or over land or water; then of any means which enable one to cope with a difficulty, or of the provision of monetary or other resources (cf. our expression ‘ways and means’).¹⁴⁴

The meaning of the word *πόρος* itself, and its obvious correlation with a *ἄπορος*, indicates that this element of Eros’s nature should be understood not so much as *having* resources, which would have been aptly indicated in the mythical account by *πλοῦτος*, but as being the very way or path itself.¹⁴⁵ Indeed, such is Eros’s nature as *πόρος*, for as daimon, he provides a “way to” the divine.

Πενία, or poverty, contributes the other part of Eros’s nature. The dialogue’s new epithet for the lack of Eros brings with it the connotation of deficiencies of the worker. Such a lack is not absolute, for the worker has just enough on which to subsist, but no excess. This sort of poverty is closely associated with the virtue of moderation (*σωφροσύνη*), since the life associated with it produces men of virtue, strength, and endurance, who are not prone to excesses, indulgences, or softness.¹⁴⁶ Taken with the portrayal of Eros as daimon and as *πόρος*, this conception of poverty suggests that a life practicing moderation is a life led by the daimon Eros. Since Eros is a daimon, such a life is also an inspired life; one who is led by Eros is characterized by enthusiasm or divine possession. This characterization of Eros as at once ascetic and enthusiastic may

¹⁴⁴ Dover, *Symposium* also cites precedent for personification of Poros: “A cosmogony expounded by Alcman (fr. 5.2.ii) personified Poros, but Alcman probably meant ‘Way’ or ‘Track’ (in the primeval void). Metis in Hes. *Theog.* 886 is the first wife of Zeus and (fr. 343) mother of Athena” (141-42).

¹⁴⁵ Guthrie notes that “Pluton, ‘the rich’, was the same as Hades the lord of the dead” (*The Greeks and their Gods*, 284).

¹⁴⁶ The concept of *πενία* is more fully discussed in chapter three.

appear paradoxical, but Diotima's explanation of the characteristics of Eros shows how both his poverty and his resource are essential parts of the phenomena and the divinity designated as Eros.

In *Prolegomena to the study of Greek Religion*, Jane Harrison describes asceticism and ecstasy as the two different characterizations of Dionysus and his followers.¹⁴⁷ There are, in the cult of Dionysus, two distinct dispositions: one is characterized by the gentleness with which the female celebrants suckle and care for young wildlife; the other is characterized by the violent frenzy with which these same celebrants rend them to pieces. Both actions occur to the celebrants as instances of standing outside of themselves, as a kind of *ἔκστασις*; both are, indeed, pictures of humanity at one with the violent extremes of the natural world, no longer guided by human rationality or morality, but possessed by some other power, some daimon or god. Such is the duality of Eros, at one moment bitter, at another sweet; at one moment poor and needy, at another filled with vision of the beautiful itself. The asceticism described by the poverty of Eros is the condition for the resourcefulness that leads the lover to the primary instance of *ἔκστασις*—the vision of Beauty.

Diotima's theogonic account, like those of the preceding speakers, is followed by a description of the kind of life Eros lives as a consequence of his parentage. If the myth in Plato's *Symposium* that presents Eros as a child of poverty (*πενία*) and resource (*πόρος*) is understood as central to the view of Eros articulated by Diotima, both the nature of Eros itself and the implications it holds for the ethical life are presented in a new light. As deficiency, Eros indicates at once a lack in the lover and the object of Eros that is

¹⁴⁷Harrison, *Prolegomena*, 450-3.

desired by the lover. Diotima's further explication of Eros shows that its nature does not lie merely in its lack of the beloved object, but also in its longing for the beloved object, and that the true nature of Eros is revealed by understanding its proper object. The object is not merely a beautiful particular that the lover desires to possess as her own, but a desire to possess a good. The desire to possess this good is so strong that the lover is willing to suffer for the sake of the good: willing, in the particular, to suffer bodily harm in order to attain or keep the good; willing, in the case of procreation, to suffer for the sake of offspring. The poverty of Eros, then, is not merely indicative of the lack of the beloved object, but also of the disposition of the lover as willingly undergoing deprivations for the sake of the beloved object. *Πενία*, as one essential component of Eros's nature, describes not only lack, but a disposition toward the possession of different kinds of goods.

In the analysis of Eros and its role in the ascent to the Beautiful, this deprivation is not merely one aspect of the nature of Eros, but points to an understanding of poverty as a way of being or disposition. Indeed, the joining together of the figures of *Πόρος* and *Πενία* in the single figure of Eros suggests that the poverty of Eros is at once his way. The description of Eros himself portrays him as poor and in need on the one hand, but seeking and finding a way on the other; he is intermediate between the state of deprivation and the state of possession. In addition to the many descriptions of Eros as intermediate between extremes (e.g. between the mortal and immortal, ignorance and wisdom), Eros in this way becomes intermediate as a disposition in the lover that leads the lover to the Good. Poverty is one essential aspect of this disposition, as a way that entails the cultivation of an appropriate lack that mediates between the lover and the

beloved object. The nature of Eros entails poverty; it is thus in a spiritual poverty that a way to the Good is found; one does not ‘acquire’ the Good so much as one makes a ‘place’ for it in the soul, which, being filled with Good, is united to it.

Diotima’s description of the ‘ladder of love’ in the *Symposium* lends itself to understanding Eros as such a way of being and not merely as a lack that longs for fulfillment by gaining possession of the sought object. In order to move from one stage of Eros to another, the lover must recognize that the object toward which he is currently directed is not perfect or complete, and so not the ultimate end of his striving. This recognition causes him to change his orientation toward it to reflect its position in the cosmos.¹⁴⁸ Such a change in orientation requires adopting an attitude of detachment toward the thing, described in the ascent passage by the term ἄφρονας. This is an attitude of poverty; it lets the thing be what it is and loves it insofar as it ought to be loved given the sort of thing that it is. In recognizing the sort of love appropriate to different things, and as proportional to different kinds of beauty and goodness, the lover recognizes also ‘higher’ objects of love and so his gaze is directed to the next level of loveable objects. Each movement to a higher object of love results in an object that is closer to both the beautiful and the immortal.

¹⁴⁸ *Symp.* 210b-c.

CHAPTER THREE

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF POVERTY: FROM DEFICIENCY TO ABUNDANCE

Much of the scholarship¹⁴⁹ since Vlastos's influential article has taken his conception of Platonic Eros and *εὐδαιμονία* to indicate that the Platonic conceptions of both Eros and human excellence are egoistic. Consequently, the discussion of Platonic Eros has focused on the formulation of Eros as lack that appears in the elenchus of Agathon and in the early portion of the exchange between Socrates and Diotima. This formulation of Eros as lack of the desired object then becomes the definition of Eros by which or in terms of which the rest of the exchange between Socrates and Diotima is interpreted and understood. This interpretation presents Eros and its lack as parallel to appetitive desire and its lack: the subject experiences some pain or absence that is indicative of the desire to possess a certain object; upon attaining the object, the pain is remedied, absence filled, and desire ceases. But this interpretation captures only one aspect of Plato's treatment of desire, and so also only one aspect of his treatment of the lack that appears to be its concomitant.

What is absent from these discussions is a general investigation into the concept of lack in the *Symposium* that would reveal its gradual development; such an investigation would also show that a very different concept of lack is operative in Plato's treatment of Eros in the *Symposium*.¹⁵⁰ From the beginning of Socrates' examination of

¹⁴⁹ See discussion in Chapter One.

¹⁵⁰ Catherine Osborne's work, which rejects the readings of both Vlastos and Nygren, is an exception to this. See especially pages 86-116 of her *Eros Unveiled*.

Agathon until the end of Socrates' speech, the theme of lack emerges in various forms, and is manifest in three different Greek terms: *ἐνδεια*, *πενία*, and *ἀφθονία*. Socrates' speech, in its discussion of Eros, moves from treating its relation to *ἐνδεια*, to its relation to *πενία*, and finally presents it as *φιλοσοφία ἀφθονος*. It is apparent, then, that there are at least three senses of lack at work in Socrates' speech in the *Symposium*, and that the sense of lack develops and changes alongside that of Eros as the speech progresses. Of these three words that express the lack of Eros, *πενία*, or poverty, stands out as holding special significance for understanding the lack of Eros because of its presence in the myth of Eros's origins and because of its thematic presence in the dialogue as a whole. In what follows, I will begin by discussing the importance of *πενία* in the *Symposium* and then proceed to examine the various senses of lack that emerge in the discussion of Eros.

The Importance of Poverty (πενία) in the Symposium

Poverty frames the discussion in the *Symposium*. The opening of the dialogue describes the appearance of Aristodemus, the follower of Socrates who is "small, always barefoot"¹⁵¹ as Socrates himself habitually is; this image of the poorly clothed and somewhat filthy philosopher is echoed in Aristodemus' subsequent description of Socrates, who he encounters in an unusual state: clean, well-dressed, and shod.¹⁵² Both Aristodemus and Socrates are here portrayed as poor, for their usual habit of dress is that of the poor. The final description of Socrates by Alcibiades again portrays Socrates as

¹⁵¹ *Symp.* 173b2-3.

¹⁵² *Symp.* 174a1-4.

poor, and as an embodiment of the Eros-daimon previously described by Diotima, even though Alcibiades was not present for that discussion.¹⁵³ The middle portion of Diotima's speech identifies Eros as a child of Poverty; indeed his intermediate status is inextricably bound to poverty, and the description of his nature includes a description of his life of poverty. The theme of poverty,¹⁵⁴ then, is woven throughout the *Symposium*, and serves as a framework for the discussion of Eros.

R.E. Allen notes that it is not only poverty that frames the drama of the *Symposium*, but hubris as well.¹⁵⁵ Allen argues that "the reader is meant to be reminded of Socrates' trial by Alcibiades' speech" and draws attention to the charge of hubris he levels against Socrates.¹⁵⁶ This charge, as Allen notes, echoes Agathon's charge of hubris found at the beginning of the dialogue.¹⁵⁷ If it is Socrates' trial of which we are to think, then it is perhaps also appropriate to recall Socrates' witness to his innocence. In

¹⁵³ For an interesting discussion of the images of Socrates and Aristodemeus as poor, see chapter four of Osborne's *Eros Unveiled*.

¹⁵⁴ In the aforementioned examples, poverty is used to apply both to material conditions and immaterial ones. This distinction will be treated more fully later in this chapter.

¹⁵⁵ "This theme knits the end of the *Symposium* to the beginning. In the beginning, Agathon, ever courteous invited Socrates to lie next to him so that he might absorb Socrates' wisdom by proximity, as by a wick. Socrates, equally courteous, disclaimed his own wisdom by comparison to Agathon's, whose victory in dramatic competition had shown his wisdom to the whole of Athens. Agathon replies to Socrates with the exact words Alcibiades will use: "You are outrageous [*ὕβριστής*], Socrates" (175e), and suggests that Dionysus will be the judge of their contending claims. That is, Dionysus will judge between Agathon's claim that Socrates is wiser and Socrates' claim that Agathon is wiser" (Allen, *Symposium*, 107-8).

¹⁵⁶ Allen, *Symposium*, 106.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 107-8.

the *Apology*, Socrates defends his teaching with the following words: “I, on the other hand, have a convincing witness that I speak the truth, my poverty (*πενία*).”¹⁵⁸

In *Greek Popular Morality*, Kenneth Dover’s discussion of poverty indicates its connection to hubris. According to his work, it was not uncommon for defendants to invoke poverty as evidence for their innocence, particularly to show that they had not acted out of hubris.¹⁵⁹ In both the *Apology* and the *Symposium*, Socrates’ poverty is presented as such a defense against the charge of hubris.

It is notable, then, that in the *Symposium* the Eros-daimon and Socrates alike are presented as poor. The grasping and greedy nature of hubris is their antithesis; their poverty is a testament to their virtue. Hubris itself is contrasted with moderation in the *Phaedrus*.¹⁶⁰ Dover draws attention to the causes of hubris and *σωφροσύνη* in his discussion of poverty, writing “the good things of life implant *hybris* but the bad things *sōphrosynē*.”¹⁶¹ Thus the portrayal of both Socrates and Eros as poor suggests that

¹⁵⁸ *Apologia* 31c3.

¹⁵⁹ “The besetting sin of the rich was thought to be *hybris*: Dem. xxi 182, Lys. vii 13f. (cited above), where ‘need’ and ‘*hybris*’ are contrasted motivations; [...]Thuc. iii 45.4 (cf. I 38.6, 84.2), poverty implants daring through necessity, but high status engenders greed through *hybris* and pride; Xen. *Cyr.* viii 4.14, the good things of life implant *hybris* but the bad things *sōphrosynē*. Money was power, the power to buy flattery and support and to bribe witnesses; cf. IV.B.2 and V.B.2 on generous expenditure in the pursuit of honour and gratitude” (Kenneth Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), 110-11).

¹⁶⁰ In commenting on the first speech of Socrates in the *Phaedrus*, Grube notes, “When our judgement wins we have self-control or moderation (*σωφροσύνη*), when desire leads us to pleasure *against our judgement*, we have excess (*ὑβρις*). In the case of food this victory of hubris is gluttony, in the case of drink, drunkenness, and in the case of the pleasure to be got from beautiful bodies it is Eros” Grube, *Plato’s Thought*, 107).

¹⁶¹ Dover, *Greek Popular Morality*, 110-11.

moderation (*σωφροσύνη*) is related to, if not concomitant with, poverty and so also Eros. Poverty and hubris set the tone for the drama of the *Symposium*, marking the beginning and end of the presentation of Socrates as the paradigmatic erotic man. It seems, then, that poverty (and perhaps in particular poverty as opposed to hubris) is central to an understanding of the *Symposium*. It is necessary, then, to investigate what sort of thing poverty is and what sense it carries in the context of the *Symposium* and its discussion of Eros.

The Concept of Poverty

The concept of poverty itself is quite broad; it may signify a simple lack or deficiency; it may signify a harmful lack or deficiency; it may signify deficiency with respect to money, material goods, physical well-being, spiritual or mental well-being.¹⁶² Poverty is also conceived of in degrees, from absolute indigence to meager subsistence. It may indicate a void that needs filling, or it may indicate a void that remains empty. As Plato's discussion in *Republic IX* explains, mixed pleasures that arise from fulfilling

¹⁶² For further discussion and conceptual analysis of poverty, see John D. Jones, *Poverty and the Human Condition: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1990). It is notable that Jones's description of poverty emphasizes the modern conception of poverty as negative deficiency, just as the twentieth century Platonic literature conceives of the negative deficiency of Eros. "In judging that people live in conditions of poverty, we commonly say that such people lack what is needed or are fundamentally unable to accomplish certain goals and ends or obtain a certain quality of life. The poor are subjected to substantive deprivation, inadequate resources and so forth. Caught in such conditions, peoples' lives are diminished and cut off in various ways. To be poor, then, is to be blocked, frustrated and thwarted in the realization of one's existence. So far as people are poor or impoverished, they are in various ways crippled and paralyzed in their attempt to work out their lives, not merely with respect to survival but also with respect to enhancement and flourishing. As a blockage and frustration of human life, poverty takes on a destructive character" (Jones, 5-6).

voids, like hunger, involve voids that require filling; but the pleasure arising from seeing involves a “void” of another kind, one that is never filled, and such pleasures bear a closer resemblance to those that are proper to the rational soul. In seeing, smelling, and thinking, pleasure occurs in the activity itself, and is not arrived at as a consequence of movement from a state of deficiency to a state of satiety. The examples of seeing and smelling also reveal that poverty can indicate a state or disposition; in this sense it may indicate a faculty in its potentiality, in a state of readiness, that is brought into actuality by the presence of some object outside of it. This is, for instance, what occurs when the eye or the soul beholds something beautiful.

There are two other kinds of conceptual distinctions that are relevant to the discussion of poverty in the *Symposium*. The first distinction is between material and immaterial poverty. By material poverty, I mean deficiencies with respect to physical or material goods. By immaterial poverty, I mean deficiencies with respect to spiritual or mental goods. The second distinction is between kinds or degrees of poverty. Extreme poverty is designated by terms such as indigence and usually indicates an absolute or nearly absolute deficiency of goods necessary for life. The term “working poor”, on the other hand, is often used to indicate a class of people who have some goods necessary for life, but who have only enough of these to subsist or survive. Both of these distinctions are found in Greek discussions of poverty.

Though the term for poverty (*πενία*) has for its primary meaning a lack of material goods, it is sometimes used to signify other kinds of lack as well. Xenophon, in his *Symposium*, uses the term in reference to the soul.¹⁶³ Euripides applies poverty to the

¹⁶³ Xenophon *Symposium* 4. 34.

body in *Electra*,¹⁶⁴ and in *Works and Days*, Hesiod writes of “baneful, spirit-destroying (θυμοφθόρος) poverty.”¹⁶⁵ The term poverty, then, is applicable not only to external material goods, but to body, soul, and θυμός, and so also to immaterial goods. It is evident, then, that the use of the term poverty and its derivatives to describe both material and immaterial lack is not strange to the Greek mind, and that our own understanding of the term in Plato’s writing should not be restricted to material or physical deficiencies associated with desire.

The Greek language also distinguishes between the poverty proper to the working man (πενία), and the absolute poverty of the beggar (πτωχεία), thus recognizing different degrees of deficiency. The latter term, πτωχεία, does not appear in the text of the *Symposium*, but two other terms expressing deficiency do appear: ἔνδεια and ἀφθονία. The first term, ἔνδεια, is used to indicate want, lack, or need; in particular, when coupled with ἐπιθυμία, ἔνδεια carries the meaning of want or need.¹⁶⁶ Though the word is sometimes used to indicate material or economic deficiency,¹⁶⁷ the meaning of the word is broader than this and can indicate a lack of any sort. The second term, ἀφθονία, describes “the lack of a grudging attitude, therefore ‘abundance.’”¹⁶⁸ While this may

¹⁶⁴ Euripides *Electra* 372.

¹⁶⁵ Hesiod *Opera et Dies* 717.

¹⁶⁶ Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, revised and augmented by Sir Henry Jones, with a revised supplement, 1996.

¹⁶⁷ It is used in this way at *Symposium* 203d, to express the want of Eros insofar as he shares the nature of his mother, Πενία.

¹⁶⁸ Clyde Murley, “In Praise of the Less Abundant Life,” *Classical Quarterly* 42, no. 6 (March 1947): 331-339, 333.

seem to be a paradoxical definition, attending to the etymology of the term reveals that the meaning of abundance is secondary, arising from the understanding that a lack of *φθόρος*, or envy, frees the soul from the trammels of desire, allowing it to enjoy fully the goods of which it is possessed, thus providing one with abundance.¹⁶⁹ Within the *Symposium*, *ἔνδεια* appears in the elenchus of Agathon as the term descriptive of the lack that is common in the experiences of *ἐπιθυμία*, Eros, and *βουλησις*. The language of lack, however, shifts to using *πενία* in Diotima's presentation of the parentage of Eros. *Ἐνδεια* appears only twice in this discussion.¹⁷⁰ *Ἀφθονος* appears in the final section of Diotima's discourse, as descriptive of the philosophical disposition of the true lover at the pinnacle of his erotic ascent. In what follows, I will examine the meaning of each of these terms, their use in Platonic dialogues from the same period as the *Symposium*, and the role they play in the development of the concept of poverty in the *Symposium*.

Ἐνδεια

Ἐνδεια is a rather general term for deficiency or lack. In the middle dialogues, Plato uses the term in two primary ways. First, *ἔνδεια* appears in discussions of pleasure, and here often indicates the deficiency that is experienced as painful in appetite.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ *Ἀφθονία* is used to denote abundance or plenitude, simply, in addition to its meaning as a “lack of a grudging attitude”, but the definitions are clearly related.

¹⁷⁰ *Symposium* 203d6, 204a5-6.

¹⁷¹ *Gorgias* 496d-e.

Socrates speaks here of the “filling of the deficiency” as a pleasure.¹⁷² Second, *ἔνδεια* appears in discussions of virtue,¹⁷³ and here indicates a deficiency in two senses: as a deficiency of knowledge (either *ἐπιστήμη* or *τέχνη*) and as a deficiency of participation in the Form of the virtue in question (as, e.g. temperance in the *Charmides*).¹⁷⁴ This sense of *ἔνδεια* appears also in discussions of the Forms and the sensible world. A passage in the *Phaedo* uses *ἔνδεια* to indicate lack of participation in the Form of equality, so that the being existing in the sensible realm is characterized by this deficiency and is, at the same time, stretching toward (*ὀρέγω*) the perfection of the Form that it lacks.¹⁷⁵

Ἐνδεια in the Gorgias and the Protagoras

Both the *Gorgias* and the *Protagoras* use *ἔνδεια* to indicate the deficiency experienced in appetite. In the *Protagoras*, *ἔνδεια* is contrasted with *ὑπερβολή* in the context of a discussion of pleasure.¹⁷⁶ Socrates argues here that “our salvation in life depends on the right choice of pleasures and pains, be they more or fewer, greater or lesser, farther or nearer” and so seems “first of all, to be measurement, which is the study

¹⁷² “Am I to ask any further, or do you agree that every deficiency (*ἔνδεια*) and appetite (*ἐπιθυμία*) is painful?” (*Grg.* 496d4); “And drinking is a filling of the deficiency (*ἔνδεια*), and is a pleasure?” (*Grg.* 496e1).

¹⁷³ A general survey of usage of *ἔνδεια* and its related forms reveals some commonality of usage in Plato, most significant here seem to be its usages in discussions of pleasure and in discussions of virtue (where it is applied to show a lack of said virtue, e.g. temperance in the *Charmides*).

¹⁷⁴ *Charmides* 158c4.

¹⁷⁵ *Phaedo* 74d, 75b-c.

¹⁷⁶ *Protagoras* 357a-e.

of relative excess (*ὑπερβολή*) and deficiency (*ἐνδεια*) and equality.”¹⁷⁷ Those who err in choices regarding pleasure and pain are described as having a deficiency (*ἐνδεια*) of *ἐπιστήμη* (with regard to measurement).¹⁷⁸ This deficiency is described as ignorance, and this seems to be a way of falling short of knowledge; what is lacking here is participation in *ἐπιστήμη*, and in this sense, *ἐνδεια* is a lack with respect to the fulfillment of one’s rational nature.

Similarly, in the *Gorgias*, *ἐνδεια* is used to describe a deficiency of wisdom or justice. Later in the same work *ἐνδεια* is used to describe a deficiency in skill (*τέχνη*). In the *Gorgias* and the *Protagoras*, *ἐνδεια* is applied to describe a falling short of the form of a virtue, such as wisdom, and a falling short of an ability or power, like oratory.¹⁷⁹

Ἐνδεια in Republic IX and the Philebus

Ἐνδεια appears again in the discussion of pleasure in the *Philebus*.¹⁸⁰ Here, *ἐνδεια* is opposed to *ἡδονή*, so that those who are diseased “feel greater deprivations (*ἐνδεια*), and also greater pleasures (*ἡδονή*) at their replenishment.”¹⁸¹ Later in the same dialogue, in response to Protarchus’ question as to what “kinds of pleasures that one could rightly regard as true”, Socrates responds that these are “Those that are related to so-called pure

¹⁷⁷ *Prt.* 357b2.

¹⁷⁸ *Prt.* 357d4-e9.

¹⁷⁹ *Grg.* 487e1-5; 522c7-e6.

¹⁸⁰ *Philebus* 45b8, 51b5.

¹⁸¹ *Phlb.* 45b8.

colors and to shapes and to most smells and sounds and in general all those that are based on imperceptible and painless lacks (*ἐνδεια*), while their fulfillments are perceptible and pleasant.”¹⁸²

This distinction between kinds of pleasures is articulated as the distinction between pure and mixed pleasures in Book IX of the *Republic*, and a further distinction is drawn between the mixed and fleeting pleasures of the body and the pure and more real pleasures of the soul.¹⁸³ Indeed, in this passage Socrates argues that a mixed pleasure is not pleasure at all, but merely the cessation of pain. These pleasures, which involve constant change and motion from the state of pain to its cessation, are sharply contrasted with the pure and true pleasures of the philosophical part of the soul. The example of bodily pleasure, however, does provide a foundation for describing the truer pleasures of the soul; for just as there are “kinds of filling up (*πλήρωσις*) such as filling up with bread or drink or delicacies or food in general”, so also is there a “kind of filling up that is with true belief, knowledge, understanding, and, in sum, with all of virtue.”¹⁸⁴ It is clear, however, that Plato does not mean that the filling up of the soul brings humans to an intermediate state between pain and pleasure as does the filling up of the body. The bodily desires require constant refilling and involve constant motion between states of depletion and repletion; but knowledge, understanding, and virtue complete the soul in a

¹⁸² *Phlb.* 51b5.

¹⁸³ *Respublica* 583c1-586b4. It is notable that here too Plato identifies a specific subset of desire as anticipatory. This parallels the distinction he draws in the elenchus of Agathon that distinguishes desire simply from the desire for future goods or continued possession of present goods.

¹⁸⁴ *Resp.* 585b9-c1.

way that does not require continual refilling. The question posed by Plato's treatment of desire and its bodily and spiritual manifestations, then, is what sort of emptiness or deficiency is involved in each.

Aristotle argues that the view "that pain is the lack of that which is according to nature, and pleasure is replenishment" is insufficient to account for all kinds of pleasures, even those counted to be sensual.¹⁸⁵ Plato's examples in *Republic* IX make a similar point; the examples of sight and smell show that not all sensual pleasures are preceded by a painful state or, as the examples in the *Philebus*, a perceptible lack. This indicates that Plato does not view lack or deficiency as a sufficient account of desire or Eros; the description of desire as a lack of the desired object is only partial. We may be able to distinguish particular bodily desires that involve the presence of pain and clearly involve a painful deficiency. It is clear, though, that the spectrum of sensual experience exceeds this model, and since desire itself is not limited to sensual experience though it be understood as its parallel, its manifestations as proper to other elements of the soul will, similarly, exceed a model of desire based on fulfillment of perceptible deficiency.

The imperceptible deficiency that Plato describes as present in the experience of the sensual pleasures of sight, hearing, and smell provide a model for understanding what sort of deficiency is involved in these instances. The pleasure of a beautiful sight indicates that some beautiful object that was not previously present is now present and that gazing at it is pleasant. Any object, regardless of its beauty, might have activated the activity of seeing. The beauty of the object in particular is what makes the activity pleasant. This indicates a further perfection of the activity of seeing rather than the filling

¹⁸⁵ Aristotle *Ethica Nichomachea* 10. 3. 1173a30 ff.

of a deficiency; and yet, when we gaze at something beautiful the activity of seeing is more complete and more intense, and in this sense fills the deficiency of the activity of seeing that would occur if the visible object were deficient in beauty. There are then, two deficiencies to be distinguished in the experienced pleasure of beautiful visions: the first is the deficiency of the visible object, which may be more or less beautiful, the second is the deficiency in the activity of seeing itself, which may be more or less pleasant and intense depending on the beauty of its object.

The discussion of pleasure in Book IX of the *Republic* is presented in terms of *πλήρωσις* and *κενώσις*. The highest pleasures are those that do not involve kinesis, because they are not a movement from a state of emptiness to a state of fulfillment. These are pleasures like smell and sight, which do not involve a movement from a painful state of deficiency to a sated state that is not so much pleasurable as an absence of pain. The true pleasures are the pure pleasures which involve no pain or experienced deficiency. Gazing at a beautiful object is the physical analogue of the intellectual pleasure Plato has in mind. The intermediate state at which one arrives upon filling a deficiency is called *ἡσυχία*; this is a state of rest. If pure pleasures proceed from this state, the implication is that stillness (*ἡσυχία*) is a precondition for pure pleasure. At any rate, the pain suggested in Plato's treatment of pleasure here is the longing for fulfillment that involves pain; the pleasures of smell and sight do not involve the same kind of deficiency, but rather proceed from the intermediate state. In these cases, the powers of sight and smell are in repose but ready to be acted upon from without and in being actuated by beautiful and pleasant objects, bring pleasure. Had the objects encountered been ugly and unpleasant, the consequent motion would have been aversion and been attended by pain. This is the

analogue for what occurs at the level of mind or soul. So, what is commonly taken to be pleasure is this movement from a state of deficiency to a state of rest. Such a pleasure is not a true or pure pleasure in Plato's sense, as it involves pain and because the resultant state is not one of actual pleasure, but one of the absence of either pleasure or pain. Pure pleasure is beyond this intermediate state, and the best kind of pleasure (or filling up) is that of the soul, not just because it proceeds from an intermediate state rather than from a deficiency, but also because the pleasures proper to the soul are different in kind. It is precisely because the pleasures of the soul are different in kind that they are more stable and more permanent. The quality of the pleasures that are proper to the soul are like the quality of the soul itself, and so appropriate to it and to the soul's proper activity. Thus, the best pleasures are those achieved by the exercise of the soul's proper activity, reason.

Ἔνδεια in the Symposium

In the *Symposium*, ἔνδεια first appears as a description of Eros in the elenchus of Agathon. The first question of the elenchus is whether Eros “is always ‘of something.’”¹⁸⁶ It is from Agathon's affirmation of this that Socrates moves to a discussion of Eros as desire. Both Allen and Bury note that the discussion in the elenchus is designed to mark the futuristic nature of desire—that a person does not desire

¹⁸⁶ *Symp.* 200a1. Of this intentionality Allen writes: “Socrates begins his elenchus of this claim by pointing out that Eros is relational in character: love is always love *of* something, desire desire *for* something. Eros falls in that class of terms later described as *ta pros ti*, terms which have their meaning ‘toward’ something else” (R. E. Allen, “A Note on the Elenchus of Agathon: *Symposium* 199c-201c,” *Monist* 50, no. 3 (July 1966): 460-463, 460).

what he has at present, but may desire to continue to have it.¹⁸⁷ It is this feature of desire that allows Socrates to proceed to his next conclusion—that one desires what one does not have, and thus what one lacks (*ἐνδεια*). It is thus *as* desire (*ἐπιθυμία*) that Eros is described in terms of its deficiency.¹⁸⁸ This feature of Eros is reiterated by Diotima a short time later: “And yet you’ve agreed, in Love’s case, that a lack of good and beautiful things is what makes him desire the very things he lacks.”¹⁸⁹ This observation, that Eros lacks good and beautiful things, excludes him from divinity, leading to the conclusion that Eros is a daimon and ultimately to the account of his mythical origins.

The elenchus presents the following argument: Eros is a kind of desire or wish, and desiring and wishing are always for something, and something that we do not have at present. In this way, the understanding of Eros as desire is the thematic introduction of Eros as intrinsically bound to poverty. Though the myth of Eros’s parentage does not begin Diotima’s account of Eros, the idea of poverty as essential to the nature of Eros is present from the beginning of her account, having already been established as proper to Eros in the elenchus of Agathon.

¹⁸⁷ “ 200C βούλομαι...καὶ ἐπιθυμῶ. The point here emphasized is that βούλησις and ἐπιθυμία, when their sense is investigated are found to apply only to the future (εἰς τὸν ἔπειτα χρόνον), not to the present (ἐν τῷ παρόντι). For investigation shows that “I wish for what I have” is really an abbreviated phrase for “I wish to continue having in the future what I now at present have” (βούλομαι τὰ νῦν παρόντα παρεῖναι). For the force of βούλησις, cp. Isocr. *Hel* 219A....” (Bury, 92).

¹⁸⁸ *Ἐνδεια* is the word used here as characteristic of Eros’s “lack”; it appears again in Diotima’s discussion of the nature of Eros as intermediate subsequent to the myth of his origins. Instances of *ἐνδεια* occur at *Symposium* 200e9, 202d1, 203d3; *πενία* is used at 203b4, 203b7, 203c5.

¹⁸⁹ *Symp.* 202d1-2.

Given the senses of ἔνδεια identified previously, ἔνδεια in the *Symposium* might indicate the painful deficiency experienced in appetite; given the presence of ἐπιθυμία in the elenchus of Agathon, this seems plausible. Ἐνδεια then might be taken to indicate, appropriately, the lack that accompanies desire, especially desire of a bodily nature. In two of the passages (from the *Philebus* and the *Republic*) mentioned above, however, Plato's discussions of pleasure and desire indicate that the pleasure derived from fulfilling a perceptible deficiency is a pleasure of the lowest order. Furthermore, his examination of Agathon uses the example of fulfillment as an example of cessation of desire, in a way that is parallel to the examples of the fulfillment of bodily deficiencies given in the *Republic*. The filling of this lack, then, leaves the desirer (or lover) in an intermediate state that is neither pleasure nor pain, but ἡσυχία. True pleasure proceeds from this state, not from a state of perceived deficiency or pain. Thus, in one sense, and because Plato often speaks on more than one level, ἔνδεια can be taken to be the lack that is proper to ἐπιθυμία in Socrates' initial exchange with Agathon. It is not, however, limited to this sense.

In another sense, however, ἔνδεια in this part of the *Symposium* can be taken to indicate a deficiency in the lover himself, with respect to his participation in the Forms. Applying such an interpretation to the meaning of ἔνδεια in the *Symposium* would suggest that the lack of Eros is descriptive of the lover's various deficiencies with respect to Forms. This is borne out by the later portrayal of the Eros-daimon as intermediate and so lacking full participation in beauty, wisdom, goodness, and immortality. The lover, just as the Eros-daimon who possesses him, is in need of beauty, wisdom, goodness, and immortality. Possession by the Eros-daimon is a means by which to reach toward the

perfections of the Forms, participation in which completes and perfects the lover himself. This indicates that Eros, in its broadest meaning, is the lack of what is perfective of any given lover, and indeed this is in agreement with the presentation of cosmic Eros in which all things stretch toward the fulfillment of their individual Forms and at the same time toward a participation in the immortality that is proper only to the Forms themselves. Kosman suggests such an understanding of *ἔνδεια* in the following passage:

But the conclusion is clear and interesting, for it suggests that the *πρῶτον φίλον* is that of which we may be said to be properly *ἐνδεεῖς*, and this is our own true but fugitive nature, that which is for us *φύσει οἰκεῖν*, even if we are separated from it. [Lysis]

The proper object of erotic love is thus understood by Plato to be *τὸ οἰκεῖον καὶ ἐνδεές*, that which belongs naturally to oneself, but from which one has been separated. Erotic love is thus primarily for Plato self-love, for it is finally our true self which is at once native to us and lacked by us....”Self-love” does not here mean love of love, like the understanding of understanding in the *Charmides*, but one’s love of one’s self. Nor does it mean selfish love, the vanity and egocentricism which is assailed in Book V of the *Laws*. It means at the human level that erotic self-striving which characterizes all being: the desire of each thing to become what it is.¹⁹⁰

Kosman’s interpretation is supported by the use of *ἔνδεια* at *Symposium* 204a5-6, where Diotima says that “The person who doesn’t think he lacks something won’t desire what he doesn’t think he lacks.” This statement follows upon her account of Eros’s parentage and her explanation of how his parentage further explains his intermediate nature. It is necessary, on this account, that one who seeks wisdom be neither wise nor ignorant, else he will not seek wisdom, either because he does not lack it, or because he is not aware that he lacks it. Ultimately, the *ἔνδεια* of the lover is distinct from the lack of mere bodily desire, which ceases upon fulfillment. This may be one aspect or sense of Eros, insofar

¹⁹⁰ Kosman, 60.

as it indicates sexual desire or desire generally.¹⁹¹ As noted earlier, however, *ἐνδεια* and its derivatives appear throughout the elenchus of Agathon and in the initial exchange between Socrates and Diotima; the term gives way to *πενία* further along in the dialogue. The absence of *ἐνδεια* in the ensuing treatment is notable.

Πενία

Πενία is the abstract substantive etymologically related to the verb *πένομαι* and the substantive *πένης*, which means “one who works for his living, day-labourer, poor man” and is opposed to the *πλούσιος* or wealthy man.¹⁹² The kind of poverty indicated by *πενία* is not an absolute impoverishment, but indicates a lack of the sort of surplus that is proper to the wealthy man. The *πένης* has just enough to meet his needs, and no more. As such, the *πένης* has no leisure, but must be constantly at work, seeking the things necessary to his survival. Contrasted with *ἐνδεια*, then, *πενία* indicates a more specific kind of lack than does *ἐνδεια*, and this is deficiency as embodied in the working man; not deficiency or lack *simpliciter*, but with respect to the excesses of extreme lack or extreme surplus. As such, *πενία* indicates appropriate deficiency, i.e., the *πένης* has what is necessary for his well-being, but not a surplus that would be detrimental to his well-being nor a deficiency that would be detrimental to his well-being.

Plato’s usage of *πενία* in the middle dialogues does not indicate the same sort of distinct usages as *ἐνδεια*. *Πενία* appears most frequently in general discussions of wealth

¹⁹¹ Kenneth Dover, *Greek Homosexuality: Updated and with a new Postscript*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989), 43.

¹⁹² Liddell, Scott, and Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*.

and poverty as they are related to material possessions and consequently how these condition the possibilities of the person or city to whom they belong. In the *Phaedo* and the *Symposium*, however, *πενία* is discussed as it is related to the philosopher, and this indicates that the term bears significantly on how the philosophical life is to be lived. Nonetheless, because Plato's use of *πενία* and its cognates is more often attributive than descriptive, it will be useful to draw upon other historical sources to further clarify the concept of *πενία*. As the discussion of *πενία* in section one above has shown, general Greek usage connects *πενία* with *σωφροσύνη* and opposes it to greed and hubris. In what follows, I will make use of the texts of Aristophanes and Xenophon, and the historical work of Jaeger to provide a fuller understanding of *πενία* and its relationship to *σωφροσύνη*. This will, in turn, provide the foundation for understanding the significance of *πενία* in Diotima's explanation of Eros's nature and origins.

In the *Symposium*, the term '*πενία*' emerges in the context of the myth of the origins of Eros. In this myth, Diotima identifies the parents of Eros as *Πόρος* (Resource) and *Πενία* (Poverty).¹⁹³ The parentage of Eros is then used to describe the nature of Eros himself:

Because, then, he is the son of Resource and Poverty, Love's situation is like this. First, he is always poor (*πένης*), and far from delicate and beautiful, as most people think he is; he is hard, dirty, barefoot, homeless, always sleeping on the ground, without blankets, stretching out under the sky in doorways and by the roadside, because he has his mother's nature, always with lack (*ἐνδεΐα*) as his companion. His father's side, for its part, makes him a schemer after the beautiful and good, courageous, impetuous, and intense, a clever hunter, always weaving new devices, both passionate for wisdom and resourceful in looking for it, philosophizing through all his life, a clever magician, sorcerer, and sophist; his nature is neither that of an immortal, nor that of a mortal, but on the same day, now he

¹⁹³ *Symp.* 203b1-c5.

flourishes and lives, when he finds resources, and now he dies, but then comes back to life again, because of his father's nature, and what he gets for himself is always slipping away from him, so that Love is neither resourceless at any moment, nor rich, and again is in the middle between wisdom and ignorance.¹⁹⁴

It is at once striking that, though Socrates' speech to this point has spoken of Eros's lack in terms of *ἔνδεια*, the term used to describe the kind of lack essential to Eros's nature by virtue of his parentage is *πενία*. Striking, too, is the choice of *πόρος* as a partner for *πενία*, since its more usual complement would be *πλοῦτος*.¹⁹⁵ From a literary perspective, these choices frustrate the expectations of the reader for two reasons: because *πενία* has taken the place of *ἔνδεια*, and because the myth of origins is introduced immediately after a section thematizing the intermediate nature of Eros as it exists between several pairs of opposites. As an intermediate and as a daimon, Eros is placed between knowledge and ignorance, beauty and ugliness, good and bad; one would expect, then, that the intermediate nature he inherits from his parents would be a consequence of just such a pair of opposites. But this is not what follows.

Insofar as Eros is intermediate between *Πόρος* and *Πενία*, he contains the natures of both. In the same way that daimons bind the all to the all, Eros binds *Πόρος* to *Πενία*. Such being would not be possible in the case of opposites that must yield to one another. Nor is this intermediacy the same as that which, lying between opposites, represents a point on a graded scale that begins with nonbeing and ends with absolute being. Rather, this very different kind of intermediacy lies in Eros holding together two seemingly

¹⁹⁴ *Symp.* 203c5-204a1.

¹⁹⁵ The opposition is mirrored in the description of Eros's nature in the passage that follows: "so that Love is neither resourceless at any moment, nor rich..." (where *ἄπορος* is opposed to *πλοῦτος*) 203e4-5.

disparate elements of being—poverty and resourcefulness. This is borne out by the text, quoted above, that follows the myth in which Diotima describes the attributes that Eros has inherited from each of his parents. From this singular kind of intermediacy comes a singular kind of poverty, for though Eros is poor, he is never without resource; he is not utterly barren, but neither is he wealthy. This poverty is a state of being in which the poor man is continuously inventive, striving toward the things that he needs, and yet he is never so completely deficient that he becomes mired in and paralyzed by deficiency. He has learned to live with deficiency; it is his companion. Poverty, however, provides him with daring and inventiveness; poverty provides him with a way to the things that he needs.

The conception of poverty in the myth presents the lack of Eros as the lack proper to the working man, the lack of *πενία*. It is this lack that depicts the philosopher not only as lover, but as the embodiment of the *πένης*, and so provides the foundation for the later conception of him as engaging in *φιλοσοφία ἄφθορος*. Such also is the depiction of the philosopher in the *Phaedo*, and it is notable that poverty is mentioned as something that does not cause fear in the philosophical soul because it is not *φιλοχρήματος*.

It is for this reason, my friends Simmias and Cebes, that those who practice philosophy in the right way keep away from all bodily passions, master them and do not surrender themselves to them; it is not at all for fear of wasting their substance and of poverty, which the majority and the money-lovers fear, nor for fear of dishonor and ill repute, like the ambitious and lovers of honors, that they keep away from them.¹⁹⁶

Πενία in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic* is associated with the money-loving part of the soul, which is itself contrasted with the honor-loving and learning-loving parts of the

¹⁹⁶ *Phd.* 82c5.

soul. As is often the case with Plato, the material and tangible serves as a model for understanding the immaterial and intangible, and here *πενία* forms a part of the philosopher's practice for dying as the tangible description of his moderation.¹⁹⁷ But this is not the sum of the philosopher's moderation, for he must also steer clear of overzealous attachment to honor, and, ultimately to beliefs that might prevent his progress toward truth. The above passage from the *Phaedo* indicates that the philosopher does not live a moderate life because he is afraid of poverty; he does not act out of fear of suffering or deprivation. Instead, he acts out of a desire to be united with the divine, and is willing to forego bodily pleasure for the sake of attaining the much greater pleasures proper to the soul itself.¹⁹⁸

Πενία, χρηματα, and *φιλοχρηματος* appear together in other of Plato's dialogues as well. The description of poverty as a corruption of a person's financial state (*χρηματική*) in the *Gorgias* is one example of this.¹⁹⁹ Here, poverty is not just a deficiency, but a bad state of one's finances, analogous to disease as a bad state of the body and injustice as a bad state of the soul.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ This relationship between the tangible and intangible is evident also in Diotima's myth of Eros's origins, where the intangible characteristics of Eros are made tangible through Diotima's depiction of him. This seems to be what Arendt has in mind when she speaks of the ability of metaphorical thinking to unite the sensible and intellectual realms.

¹⁹⁸ "And no one who has not been a philosopher and who is not wholly pure when he departs, is allowed to enter into the communion of the gods, but only the lover of knowledge (*φιλομαθής*)...not because they fear poverty (*πενία*) as most men in their love of money do (*φιλοχρηματος*)" (*Phd.* 82b-c). In this passage, as in others, *πενία* seems proper to the money-loving part of the soul. If this is the case, then the *Republic's* tyrant would be the type most fearful of *πενία*.

¹⁹⁹ *Grg.* 477b-478a.

²⁰⁰ *Grg.* 477b-478a.

The money-loving (*φιλοχρημάτων*) part of the soul is found to be at the root of political conflict in the *Republic*. It is the cause of war with other states as well as the cause of civil war.²⁰¹ The healthy city, proposed in Book II, avoids the evils of poverty and war by prescribing a life for its citizenry that aims at moderation.²⁰² It is Glaucon's insistence on the addition of "things that go beyond what is necessary for a city" that brings about the increased needs of the city and ultimately lead it to war.²⁰³ In this instance, the city does not have enough or thinks it does not and, consequently, looks for more outside of itself. Had it maintained its subsistence state, there would have been no need for war, nor would it have been beset by poverty.

In Book IV, poverty and wealth are identified as the conditions that ruin good craftsmanship.²⁰⁴ Poverty deprives the craftsman of what he needs to do his craft well,

²⁰¹ *Resp.* 373b1-e9.

²⁰² *Resp.* 372a1-c1.

²⁰³ *Resp.* 373b4.

²⁰⁴ "Consider whether or not the following things corrupt the other workers, so that they become bad. –What things? –Wealth and poverty. –How do they corrupt the other workers? –Like this. Do you think that a potter who has become wealthy will still be willing to pay attention to his craft? –Not at all. –Won't he become more idle and careless than he was? –Much more. --Then won't he become a worse potter? --Far worse. –And surely if poverty prevents him from having tools or any of the other things he needs for his craft, he'll produce poorer work and will teach his sons, or anyone else he teaches, to be worse craftsmen. –of course. –So poverty and wealth make a craftsman and his products worse. –It seems, then, that we've found other things that our guardians must guard against in every way, to prevent them from slipping into the city unnoticed. –What are they? --Both wealth and poverty. The former makes for luxury, idleness, and revolution; the latter for slavishness, bad work, and revolution as well" (*Resp.* 4. 421d1-422a2).

while wealth makes him less likely to practice his craft or to practice it with care.²⁰⁵ It is the state intermediate between these two extremes that causes the craftsman to perform his craft well.²⁰⁶ Excess and deficiency—wealth and poverty—create conditions under which the craftsman will not or cannot work. Wealth and poverty as extremes are harmful; what is desirable and perfective is the appropriate amount.

The passages from the *Republic* reveal a complexity in Plato's characterization of poverty and wealth, but one that seems in accord with the attitude of Plato's Greece. On the one hand, wealth is viewed as necessary to living a good life, practicing and acquiring *arête*; one is able to cultivate perfection only when one has leisure to devote to such cultivation. But, as Dover notes, "like the appetites and passions, wealth can in itself distort an otherwise virtuous character."²⁰⁷ And so, alongside the recognition that poverty is not a desirable state, and that material deficiencies might interfere with the acquisition and practice of virtue, the singular virtue of the working man (*πένης*) is articulated. Jaeger writes of this virtue of the working man in the following passage:

It is not for nothing that Greece was the cradle of a civilization which places work high among the virtues. We must not be deceived by the carefree life of the Homeric gentlemen into forgetting that the land of Greece always demanded hard and constant labour from its people.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ *Resp.* 421d1-42a2.

²⁰⁶ *Resp.* 4. 421d4-422a1. On the analogy of the classes to the soul, this implies that starving or gluttony of bodily desires results in disorder.

²⁰⁷ Dover, *Greek Popular Morality*, 111.

²⁰⁸ Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: the Ideals of Greek Culture*, vol. 1, translated by Gilbert Highet (New York, Oxford University Press, 1939), 57.

And again, in a passage on Hesiod's *Works and Days*, Jaeger writes of the conception of virtue that emerges from the peasant life:

In the first part [of *Works and Days*] Hesiod made his hearers feel the curse of strife; now he must show them the values of work. He praises it as the only way to *arête*, difficult though it is. The idea of *arête* embraces both personal ability and its products—welfare, success, repute. It is neither the *arête* of the warrior noble, nor the *arête* of the landowning class, built on wealth, but the *arête* of the working man, expressed in the possession of a modest competence. *Arête* is the catchword of the second part of the poem, the real *Erga*. The aim of work is *arête* as the common man understands it. He wishes to make something of his *arête*, and he engages, not in the ambitious rivalry for chivalrous prowess and praise which is commended by the code of the aristocrat, but in the quiet strong rivalry of work. In the sweat of his brow shall he eat bread—but that is not a curse, it is a blessing. Only the sweat of his brow can win him *arête*. From this it is obvious that Hesiod deliberately sets up against the aristocratic training of Homer's heroes a working-class ideal of education, based on the *arête* of the ordinary man. Righteousness and Work are the foundations on which it is built.²⁰⁹

The passage from Jaeger indicates that poverty is a teacher of virtue, and of virtue of a distinct kind. The virtue Jaeger describes as belonging to Hesiod's peasant develops the soul of man in a direction quite different from the aristocrat; instead of beginning with surplus and leisure, the peasant begins with deficiency and work. If we consider the development of the virtue of the peasant in terms of Plato's tripartite division of the soul we see moderation of irrational appetites, but also moderation of the honor-loving part of the soul. As Jaeger suggests, the glory of the peasant is not in his status or reputation.²¹⁰ This is not to say that his *θυμός* is not developed, nor that he is without a certain kind of courage, but the power of *θυμός* is directed here toward perseverance and endurance

²⁰⁹Jaeger, *Paideia*, 1:70-71.

²¹⁰In this sense, the peasant virtue here is reminiscent of the life chosen by the philosopher in the Myth of Er. He chooses a quiet life in which he may do his own work, and so live justly.

through daily hardship. (It could be the root of the daring implanted by poverty, too). This conception of virtue as endurance and perseverance is of a piece with Plato's description of Eros as the child of *Πόρος* and *Πενία*, for he must daily work for what he needs, enduring and persevering through hardship.

Xenophon's *Symposium* situates a discussion of wealth and poverty within the context of what it means to be free or liberal—the quality of the true gentleman (*καλοικάργαδοι*). The focus of this discussion is of aristocratic *arête*, rather than of that proper to the peasant. Yet the speakers in Xenophon's *Symposium* focus on wealth and poverty as means to achieving freedom and thus also goodness; and once again *πενία* is brought to the fore as a means of acquiring and maintaining virtue.²¹¹ Bartlett notes that “Liberality (*eleutherios*) generally speaking is behavior appropriate to a free man (*eleutheros*) and came to signify more narrowly the freedom from an undue attachment to wealth, i.e., generosity (see, e.g. 4.43 below and Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 4.1).”²¹² There are two speakers, other than Socrates himself, whose speeches are remarkable for their focus on wealth and poverty. In the speeches of Charmides and Antisthenes, lack of wealth is identified as the source of the speakers' freedom.

²¹¹ The similarity between this enterprise and that suggested by Socrates in the *Republic* is striking: Each of us must neglect all other subjects and be most concerned to seek out and learn those that will enable him to distinguish the good life from the bad and always to make the best choice possible in every situation. He should think over all the things we have mentioned and how they jointly and severally determine what the virtuous life is like. That way he will know what the good and bad effects of beauty are when it is mixed with wealth, poverty, and a particular state of the soul. (Rep. IX 618c)

²¹² Robert C. Bartlett, *Xenophon: The Shorter Socratic Writings*, translations, with interpretive essays and notes by Robert C. Bartlett (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996) 135, n. 8.

Poverty in these speeches is spoken of as both material and spiritual.²¹³ Charmides praises poverty because it has freed him from many ills.²¹⁴ Though he was once wealthy, he has since been deprived of his wealth and many of the things that followed from it. But in this new poverty, Charmides finds a new tranquility. He identifies three ways in which his new poverty has benefited him: he no longer fears loss of material goods, no longer fears loss of public goods such as reputation, and he is no longer constrained by the city.²¹⁵ The consequences Charmides derives from these show that his new poverty allows him “to be bold [rather] than fearful, to be free rather than a slave, to be tended to rather than to tend to another, and to be trusted by the fatherland rather than distrusted by it.”²¹⁶ His having nothing does not cause him sorrow, but grants him freedom, especially from fear. Charmides concludes his speech with the following observation: “But now I lose nothing, for I have nothing to lose, and I always hope that I’ll lay hold of something.”²¹⁷ When Callias asks him if he tries to avoid goods that come his way, in order to avoid becoming wealthy again, Charmides responds with a description of his attitude toward possible goods that is strikingly similar to the description of the daimon Eros in Plato’s *Symposium*. He says, “*This* I do not do, but I bear up with a real love of danger if I expect to lay hold of something from somewhere or

²¹³ It is perhaps notable that Socrates later makes a similar distinction between physical and spiritual Eros.

²¹⁴ Xenophon *Symposium* 4. 29-33.

²¹⁵ Xenophon *Symposium* 4. 29-30.

²¹⁶ Xenophon *Symp.* 4. 29.

²¹⁷ Xenophon *Symp.* 4. 32.

other.”²¹⁸ Charmides, much like Plato’s daimon Eros, lives with need and pregnant expectation.

Antisthenes’ speech follows that of Charmides. He begins with a distinction between material and spiritual poverty: “human beings do not have wealth and poverty in their household but in their souls.”²¹⁹ His explanation of this statement indicates that the desire for more belongs properly to the soul, and in support of this, he cites examples of those who have plenty but still desire more. In brief, it seems that the wealthiest of men can be hungry for more wealth, and so their need or desire is not rooted in anything material, but rather in the soul itself. “Now I for my part feel great pity for them because of their sickness. For in my opinion they suffer the same things as someone who could never be satiated although he had and ate a great deal.”²²⁰ The poverty he describes is one of having just enough, sufficiency: “Nevertheless, I can eat to the point that I’m not hungry and can drink until I’m not thirsty and be dressed in such a way that I’m no colder when outside than the fabulously wealthy Callias here.”²²¹ Antisthenes’ commitment to poverty is quite striking, but it differs from the poverty that Plato seems to advocate in a significant way. Antisthenes states that no task would be “too base” (*φαῦλος*) for him to perform to get what he needed to survive, and that those who “look to cheap things” are more likely to be just than those who must have the more precious ones. This suggests, perhaps, a vulgarity or inability to appreciate the fine; though, it might also suggest that

²¹⁸ Xenophon *Symp.* 4. 33.

²¹⁹ Xenophon *Symp.* 4. 34.

²²⁰ Xenophon *Symp.* 4. 37.

²²¹ Xenophon *Symp.* 4. 37.

the “precious” things are not themselves truly fine. Either way, it suggests that the poverty of Antisthenes is a poverty more like that of the Cynics than of Plato’s Socrates, for it involves a rejection of all good things, bereft of appropriate appreciation for the truly noble, fine, and good.²²² Love and desire are not ordered or trained, but quashed.

Dover notes that there is precedent for the personification of *Πενία* in Aristophanes’ *Ploutos*.²²³ Though this is not sufficient to determine that Plato chose *Πενία* because there was a recent precedent, it does suggest that he might have intended some allusion to the *Πενία* of Aristophanes. Of particular interest is the defence *Πενία* gives of herself in this play. She argues against the criticisms of two Athenian citizens that she is of greater benefit to humanity than is wealth.

You are trying to mock and make jokes, with no concern for serious discussion, and refusing to recognize that I produce better men than Wealth does—better men both mentally and physically. With him, they are gouty and pot-bellied and thick-calved and obscenely fat; with me they’re lean and wasp-like and sting their enemies hard.²²⁴

Notable too is the passage in which *Πενία* distinguishes herself from the absolute deficiency that is designated by *πτωχεία*:

My kind of life doesn’t involve that sort of thing, by Zeus, and it never could. The life of the destitute (*πτωχεία*), which is what you’re talking about, is to have to live on nothing. The life of a poor man (*πέννης*) is to

²²² For a discussion of Antisthenes and his associations with the Cynics, see G. C. Field. *Plato and his Contemporaries* (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd. 2nd edition, 1948): 160-169.

²²³ “Aristophanes’ *Plutus* had personified Poverty in 388, a few years before Plato wrote *Smp*.” (Dover, *Symposium*, 142).

²²⁴ Aristophanes *Plutus* 557-561.

live economically and keep at one's work, not having any surplus but not having a shortfall either.²²⁵

These passages from Aristophanes support the understanding of *πενία* as a state intermediate between extreme deficiency and surplus, and as a state that maintains virtue. Taken together with the passages we have considered from Aristophanes, Hesiod, and Xenophon, we can conclude that the lack of *πενία* is not an absolute deficiency, nor is it the deficiency associated with the pain of appetitive lack. It is a lack of excess, the poverty of the working man who is just able to meet his needs, and so is in an intermediate state between absolute deficiency, or *πτωχεία*, and surplus; it is an appropriate deficiency, in brief, moderation.

The concept of lack that is presented as central to an understanding of Eros's nature is found in the concept of *Πενία*. As we have seen, *πενία* itself indicates a state characterized by both industry and moderation. The poor man is not weak and emaciated, but strong and industrious. This industrious and resourceful aspect of *πενία* in Eros is emphasized by its combination with *πόρος* in Plato's myth. *Πενία* is the kind of lack that involves resourcefulness; this is revealed even in *Πενία*'s plot to have a child by Resource.

Understanding *πενία* as a kind of moderation helps us to reconceptualize the Eros-daimon. As simultaneously poor and resourceful, he is a kind of ascetic and embodies, to borrow a phrase from Desmond, the "praise of poverty". But the poverty of the Eros-daimon is not merely material, and so neither is his asceticism. Plato's extension of the material to the immaterial yields a fuller conception of the inner life of the ascetic, the

²²⁵ Aristophanes *Plut.* 551-554.

poverty of soul and mind that is the necessary discipline for ascending to the vision of Beauty and for achieving the abundance and freedom of *ἄφθονος*.

Our conception of poverty cannot remain defined and constrained by materiality. Just as the objects of Eros become further removed from sensible reality as the lover ascends toward the vision of Beauty, so also do the objects of poverty. If poverty describes a moderation of the bodily pleasure at the lowest levels, this disposition of the soul not to be controlled by bodily desires is descriptive of the appropriate disposition of the other parts of the human soul as well. Moderation applies also to the spirited element in man, that he not love and grasp at victory and honor to excess. For the rational element, this implies that the mind must acquire a disposition of attentive waiting. The mind must wait to catch sight of the Beautiful; vision of the highest form, of Beauty itself, cannot be forced; the mind waits upon its object.

This disposition of poverty throughout the entire soul yields also a different conception of the longing that is generally associated with Eros. Because Eros is no longer the painful deficiency of appetite, the subjective experience of Eros is different. As the Socrates-Diotima dialogue moves into its final stage, Eros is characterized by its “lack of a grudging attitude”. If there is deficiency here, it is not a perceptible painful deficiency within the subject. The longing of the one who waits attentively is different from the longing of the one who grasps things (even objects of knowledge) and clings to them, unwilling to give up falsity and opinion for the sake of truth.

Plato’s Socrates continually directs the attention of his pupils away from the transient material goods of this world and toward the eternal immateriality that is the only true good; and the path to this good involves always the embrace of poverty—not a

denial that one has a mortal nature with the needs entailed by such a nature, but a denial that this is the sum of what it is to be human. The embrace of poverty involves living in such a way that one's physical needs are met, but not excessively indulged and not made the guiding principle of human existence. Rather the desire for such things that might consume a human being is directed to other things; this is what Diotima describes in the ascent passage. Poverty taken with *πόρος* becomes the way of Eros.

"Αφθονος

Of the three terms that Plato uses to indicate lack in the *Symposium*, *ἄφθονος* is perhaps the term whose meaning is most difficult to capture. Its expression of deficiency is most specific—it is a lack of *φθόνος*, or envy. To be *ἄφθονος* is to be without greed, envy, graspingness.

"Αφθονος appears infrequently in other dialogues. In the *Apology* it is used to denote great quantity. In the *Protagoras*, it conveys generosity, as opposed to stinginess, and in particular with regard to teaching what one knows (in this example, craft-knowledge), and so a generosity of soul. Perhaps most revealing is its opposite, *φθόνος*, as characteristic of the tyrannical man in the *Republic*:

In truth, then, and whatever some people may think, a real tyrant is really a slave, compelled to engage in the worst kind of fawning, slavery, and pandering to the worst kind of people. He's so far from satisfying his desires in any way that it is clear—if one happens to know that one must study his whole soul—that he's in the greatest need of most things and truly poor. And, if indeed his state is like that of the city he rules, then he's full of fear, convulsions, and pains throughout his life. And it is like this, isn't it? [...] And we'll also attribute to the man what we mentioned before, namely, that he is inevitably envious, untrustworthy, unjust, friendless, impious, host and nurse to every kind of vice, and that his

ruling makes him even more so. And because of all these, he is extremely unfortunate and goes on to make those near him like himself.²²⁶

At opposite ends of the erotic spectrum stand the tyrant and the philosopher; just as the tyrant embodies Eros at its worst, the philosopher embodies Eros at its best; likewise each of these types displays the attachment to or detachment from things that are inseparable from the type of Eros by which they are defined.

In the *Symposium*, ἄφθονος is joined with φιλοσοφία to describe the activity in which the lover is engaged at the penultimate state of the ascent to the vision of Beauty. It is, in fact, the last step the lover himself can take; this is the stage at which he arrives and waits, hoping to catch sight of Beauty itself. And so it seems to describe a state that is also an activity: a state that is preparation for vision, but which must remain engaged in its activity to maintain itself, and so a sort of habit or disposition. A disposition expresses itself in discrete moments of time through particular actions. The disposition of moderation in the mind is built on the moderation associated with πενία; it is the extension of this disposition from bodily appetites to the appetites of θυμός and νοῦς. When the whole soul has acquired πενία, the whole soul is without greed in every respect, and so in a state of ἄφθονος.

In the progression of conceptions of lack in the *Symposium*, ἄφθονος seems to follow naturally upon the presentation of Eros as the child of Πόρος and Πενία. On one conception of the spectrum of kinds of poverty and wealth, one might recognize πτωχεία as absolute deficiency and ἄφθονος as absolute abundance (rather than wealth as πλοῦτος), and πενία would be intermediate between the two. Indeed, ἄφθονος is more appropriate to

²²⁶ *Respublica* 579e1-580a5.

describe the wealth or abundance of the philosophical lover because it does not carry with it the hazards attendant upon *πλοῦτος*.

Conclusions

What emerges from the analysis of these three terms and their roles in Socrates' speech is a clearer understanding of the lack of Eros. Plato's treatment of lack in the section of the *Symposium* beginning with the elenchus of Agathon and ending with Diotima's description of the ascent to the vision of Beauty, moves from deficiency to abundance, and this movement is reflected in the changing terminology used to describe the lack of Eros. *Ἔνδεια* designates the deficiency associated with *ἐπιθυμία* and with the impetus for self-perfection. *Πενία*, which brings with it moderation, designates an appropriate deficiency. *Ἀφθονος*, opposed to the *φθόνος* of the tyrannical man, designates the deficiency that is abundance.

We have seen that there are three terms Plato uses to designate the lack of Eros in the discourse between Socrates and Diotima in the *Symposium*. The first of these is *ἔνδεια*, which indicates a lack simply taken, a deficiency. It is used primarily to designate the kinds of lack experienced in appetitive desire, those that are filled, and whose filling ends desire. It is also used by Plato to describe the deficiencies of material things with respect to their ideal forms, and so in this sense also indicates the sort of interior erotic striving of all being (and beings) on a metaphysical level. The term *ἔνδεια*, however, is prominent only in the elenchus of Agathon and the first portion of the exchange between Socrates and Diotima. The result of this discussion is to identify Eros as an intermediary or daimon, and this leads to the next stage of the discussion of Eros's lack.

The second lack is the lack of *Πενία*, which is the lack associated with the poverty of the day-laborer. This is not an absolute lack, nor a lack simply considered. The poverty of the day-laborer is one of sufficiency; he has just enough to meet his needs and no more. This is depicted, to some degree, in Diotima's explanation of the myth of Eros's parentage. In other Greek literature, *πενία* appears also as a teacher of virtue, especially the virtue of moderation. It is opposed not only to wealth (*πλοῦτος*), but also to the hubris and greed that are the offspring of wealth. Where extreme excess and deficiency breed vice, appropriate deficiency breeds virtue. *Πενία* is also viewed as implanting daring (out of necessity). In the *Symposium*, Eros as daimon, and Socrates as Eros, are both presented as embodying this kind of poverty. This poverty, as it implants moderation, is a poverty that is dispositional, and as a lack, is not a lack simply taken, but a lack with respect to excess and deficiency. This picture of poverty concludes the section of the discourse that deals with the nature of Eros itself, and the language of lack and deficiency do not appear again in the discourse until the third and final term for lack, *ἄφθονος*, appears in the ascent passage. *Πενία* designates what sort of thing Eros is, insofar as he is also *Πόρος*; *ἄφθονος* describes the works of Eros, the fruits of having acquired the requisite *πενία*, i.e. the disposition of moderation. At the penultimate stage of the ascent, the lover is described as pouring forth in *φιλοσοφία ἄφθονος*, or “a love of wisdom that grudges nothing”. The *ἄφθονος* is, literally, not envying or grudging. It is opposed to the *φθόνος* that characterizes the *Republic's* tyrannical man, the very picture of Eros gone awry. *Ἄφθονος*, being this lack of a grudging attitude, is often used to describe abundance and flourishing. In the *Symposium*, it describes the disposition necessary for the lover to achieve the vision of Absolute Beauty. Both *πενία* and *ἄφθονος* describe a

disposition essential to the true lover, the lack of graspingness that allows the lover to view the beloved object with both clarity and appreciation; the attitude of attentive waiting that allows the beloved object to be revealed. There is thus no desire to hold, possess, or control what is loved, but instead a desire to dwell with it, as the soul desires to dwell with the Forms. The disposition brought about by *πεινία* —that of moderation— governs not only the irrational appetitive element in man, but also *θυμός* and *νοῦς*, as each element has its own sort of graspingness that is its own undoing.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE INTERMEDIACY OF EROS

This chapter discusses the nature of Eros as it emerges in the exchange between Socrates and Diotima. The most significant feature of this examination is its development of the intermediate nature of Eros, and the sense in which Eros is at once *Πόρος* and *Πενία* develops out of the establishment of his intermediate nature. The discussion of Eros, beginning with the elenchus of Agathon, introduces the conception of Eros as involving *ἐνδεια*, or lack, and from here proceeds to show the relational character of Eros. This initial discussion of lack leads to the exposition of Eros as necessarily relational, and further to Diotima's description of Eros as existing between various sets of opposites and thus as intermediate or *μεταξύ*. It is his intermediate status that identifies Eros as a daimon and the human being who understands the daimonic as the *δαιμόνιος ἀνθρώπος*. There is a traceable development, then, of the concept of the intermediate in Diotima's discourse, one that begins with the recognition of Eros's lack, and derives from this lack a structure of Eros that expresses its metaphysical reality and the human psychological experience of this reality. It will be the purpose of this chapter to articulate this development.

The consequences of Eros's intermediacy are embodied in his portrayal as daimon, and particularly in the manner in which he includes both *Πόρος* and *Πενία* in his nature. The metaphysical status of the intermediate itself bears upon the interpretation of Eros's nature as intermediate between these terms. In the last chapter, we examined the sense in which the poverty of Eros is had in the disposition of temperance (*σωφροσύνη*).

This disposition of proper proportion is one manifestation of measure and is closely related to the concepts of middle and intermediacy.²²⁷

The Eros-daimon implants the resource (πόρος) that is the means or way by which the true lover ascends to the vision of the beautiful. In this sense, as a daimon possessing the lover, Eros can be understood as Πόρος. On one interpretation, the disposition of poverty necessary to the lover might be the precondition for daimonic possession; if one is to be blessed by the gods, one must not be possessed of hubris. The disposition of poverty, the acquisition of temperance, the having of things in appropriate proportion, are conditions for divine blessing. On the other hand, if Eros quite truly embraces both Πόρος and Πενία, it seems more likely that daimonic possession implants both the disposition of poverty and the “energy” or motion of Πόρος. It is, in fact, the perfect philosophical disposition: a mind that moves because inspired by the beauty of Truth, but which does not cling to its own perception of the truth because it recognizes its own finitude; the philosopher is drawn to truth itself, but willing to part with his “own” truths if they are found inadequate or defective. Possession by the Eros daimon enables one to see beauty more truly and this improved or keener vision allows one to desire the right objects, to the right degree, and in the right way. The way of life Eros implants is Πενία, as the proper amount of love for the proper sorts of things, and thus possession by the Eros daimon yields the sort of appropriate detachment depicted in the character of Socrates.

²²⁷Joseph Souilhé. *La Notion Platonicienne d'Intermédiaire dans la Philosophie des Dialogues* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1919): 9-16.

Eros, Desire, and Wish: Establishing the Intermediacy of Eros

The early discussion of Eros, first between Agathon and Socrates, and then between Socrates and Diotima, introduces the triadic structure of Eros; it is this establishment of Eros's triadic structure that serves as the foundation for its status as intermediate. The movement of the dialogue reveals Eros's intermediacy to be a consequence of his deficiency; the movement from the elenchus of Agathon, through Diotima's initial questioning of Socrates, arriving at Diotima's pronouncement that Eros is a daimon, suggests that the examination of Eros and its relationship to lack is for the sake of establishing his nature as daimon and so also as intermediate or *μεταξύ*. In what follows, I will examine the development of the intermediate status of Eros as it emerges in the elenchus of Agathon and Diotima's questioning of Socrates.

These two passages, in addition to establishing the intermediate status of Eros, discuss the relationships that exist among Eros, desire (*ἐπιθυμία*), and wish (*βούλησις*). Common to all of these terms is the indication that the desiring, loving, or wishing subject lacks the object that she desires, loves, or wishes to have. Though the distinctions among these terms may appear unimportant, they contribute significantly to understanding the development of the concept of Eros, especially with respect to establishing the similarities and differences among these three terms.

In order to understand Plato's concern with distinguishing among these terms, it will be useful to begin by noting something of the history and usage of the term 'Eros'. Dover's survey of the earliest uses of Eros and related words notes that:

Eros (with a short *o*), (which) in Homer means ‘desire’ for a woman (*Il.* xiv 315), for food and drink (*Il.* i 469 and elsewhere, in the formula ‘when they had expelled [*i.e.* satisfied] their eros of food and drink’) and for other things for which one may feel a desire capable of satisfaction (e.g. *Il.* xxiv 227, ‘when I have expelled my eros of lamentation’), and in Hesiod is personified as one of the first divine beings to come into existence (*Theogony* 120-2, ‘most beautiful among the immortals’).²²⁸

The example of expelling one’s “eros of lamentation” suggests the conception of universal or cosmic Eros that is present in both the speeches of Erixymachus and Diotima, where Eros is conceived of primarily as the cause of motion rather than as psychological desire.²²⁹ In the formulation cited above, Eros expresses the agent’s need or striving for lamentation in order to rid herself of it; it is a sort of *κἀθάρασις*, as one must lament in order to be rid of lamentation. The structure revealed here is one of divine possession, by which something apparently external takes hold of the agent, and from which the agent is only freed when she expels from herself the very thing that has taken possession of her.²³⁰ This might mean, however, that something further is required.

²²⁸ Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 43.

²²⁹ *Symp.* 186a3-b2, 188a1-b6, 207c5-208b6.

²³⁰ Dodds notes that this conception of daimonic possession is applied to various emotions in the Greek world. “There are a number of passages in Homer in which unwise and unaccountable conduct is attributed to *ate*, or described by the cognate verb *aasasthai*, without explicit reference to divine intervention. But *ate* in Homer is not itself a personal agent: the two passages which speak of *ate* in personal terms, *Il.* 9.505 ff. and 19.91 ff., are transparent pieces of allegory. Nor does the word ever, at any rate in the *Iliad*, mean objective disaster, as it so commonly does in tragedy. Always, or practically always, *ate* is a state of mind—a temporary clouding or bewildering of the normal consciousness. It is, in fact, a partial and temporary insanity; and, like all insanity, it is ascribed, not to physiological or psychological causes, but to an external “daimonic” agency. In the *Odyssey*, it is true, excessive consumption of wine is said to cause *ate*; the implication, however, is probably not that *ate* can be produced “naturally,” but rather that wine has something supernatural or daimonic about it. Apart from this special case, the agents productive of *ate*, where they are specified, seem always to be supernatural

Lamentation may be expelled by pouring forth many tears, by wailing and beating of the breast, but hunger is expelled by receiving food into the body. In both cases Eros expresses a need *of or for* something, and this displays an intentional aspect of Eros, as directed toward things other than itself, and as moving toward these things. In the above examples, both hunger and lamentation are expelled and thus “poured out”; in hunger, an appetible object is necessary to accomplish this, but this is not the case for lamentation. Hunger begins with a void that must be filled, but lamentation does not. Another notable aspect of this early use of Eros is that it identifies desires “capable of satisfaction”. Dover’s analysis suggests that, historically, there is a close association among ἐπιθυμία and the various words derived from Eros and ἐράω.²³¹

If we now turn our attention to the elenchus of Agathon and Socrates’ ensuing remarks, we find that Socrates makes several attempts to formulate a definition of Eros in

beings; so we may class all instances of nonalcoholic *ate* in Homer under the head of what I propose to call “psychic intervention.”

If we review them, we shall observe that *ate* is by no means necessarily either a synonym for, or a result of, wickedness. The assertion of Liddell and Scott that *ate* is “mostly sent as the punishment of guilty rashness” is quite untrue of Homer. The *ate* (here a sort of stunned bewilderment) which overtook Patroclus after Apollo had struck him might possibly be claimed as an instance...” (E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 5.

²³¹ “The seventh century B.C. adds the verb *erān* (also *erasthai*), ‘desire (to...)’, ‘be in love (with...)’, of which the aorist aspect is *erasthēnai*, ‘conceive a desire (for...)’, ‘fall in love (with...)’. Throughout the classical and Hellenistic periods the connotation of this group of words is so regularly sexual that other uses of it can fairly be regarded as sexual metaphor. The god Eros, depicted in the visual arts as a young winged male, is the personification of the force which makes us fall in love willy-nilly with another person.”; “Frequently Eros and *erān* are treated as synonymous with *epithūmiā* and *epithūmein*; so in Xen *Smp.* 8.2, 8.8 the changes are rung on *epithūmiā* and words of the Eros-group, with homosexual reference, and *ibid.* 4. 62-4, in a jocular figurative passage on ‘procuring’ enthusiastic pupils and teachers for their mutual intellectual benefit” (Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 43-44).

terms of its relationship to desire (*ἐπιθυμία*).²³² The formulation arising from the examination of Agathon understands Eros and desire as similar because they both entail a lack (*ἔνδεια*). At the beginning of his own discourse, Socrates indicates that he will treat first of the nature of Eros and then of its works, and in his discussion of the nature of Eros, the relations among Eros, *ἐπιθυμία*, and *ἔνδεια* again figure prominently. In what follows, I will first provide an overview of the various definitions offered in the section of the *Symposium* beginning with the elenchus of Agathon and ending at 209b where Diotima begins her discussion of the works or effects of Eros. After this summary, I will examine the importance of the presence of *ἐπιθυμία* and *βούλησις* in these passages, and how this contributes to the understanding of Eros's lack (*ἔνδεια*).

The first provisional definition is in the elenchus of Agathon, where Socrates asks whether Eros desires (*ἐπιθυμέω*) “that of which it is the love”.²³³ The next provisional definition occurs at 202d1, where Diotima shows Socrates that his answers have led to the conclusion that “Eros, by reason of lack of good and beautiful things, desires those very things he lacks.”²³⁴ Eros is next defined as the wish (*βούλησις*) humans have “to possess good things for themselves forever”,²³⁵ and again, shortly after this as “every

²³² Bury notes that Socrates’ “encomium proper is preceded by a preliminary dialectical discussion with Agathon, the object of which is to clear the ground of some popular misconceptions of the nature of Eros” (introduction, xxxvi). He seems to be correct in this, as an examination of the argument, I think, will reveal.

²³³ *Symp.* 200a2.

²³⁴ *Symp.* 202d1.

²³⁵ *Symp.* 205a1. Later, however, at *Symposium* 206a1-10 *βούλωμαι* drops out, and Eros is simply “of” the things that are its objects (in the genitive).

desire (*ἐπιθυμία*) for good things and happiness.”²³⁶ The final formulation of the definition of Eros is provided by Diotima:

Eros necessarily desires (*ἐπιθυμέω*) immortality with the good, from what has been agreed, since its object is to possess the good for itself forever. It necessarily follows from this account, then, that Eros is also love of immortality...Once she asked, Socrates, what do you think is cause (*αἰτία*) of this love (Eros) and desire (*ἐπιθυμία*)?...all beasts...desire (*ἐπιθυμέω*) to reproduce.²³⁷

As is evident from this brief summary, the examination of Eros from the elenchus of Agathon through Diotima’s discourse on the nature of Eros frequently refers to its relationship to *ἐπιθυμία* and *βούλησις*. Though both terms appear frequently in the discussion of what sort of thing Eros is, they appear much less frequently after the discussion turns toward an examination of the works of Eros, and neither term appears in the ascent passage. The location and incidence of these terms in the various provisional definitions of Eros that are offered as descriptions of its nature introduce *ἔνδεια* as an aspect of Eros, and suggest that *βούλησις* and *ἐπιθυμία*, though closely related to Eros, may be distinguished from it.

Bury suggests that the initial discussion of Eros in the elenchus²³⁸ in terms of *ἐπιθυμία* and *βούλησις* is aimed “to guard against a possible misunderstanding as to the nature of *βούλησις* and *ἐπιθυμία* which might arise from carelessness in analyzing the sense of popular phraseology.”²³⁹ By popular phraseology, Bury seems to mean that people

²³⁶ *Symp.* 205d1.

²³⁷ *Symp.* 207a1- c1.

²³⁸ *Symp.* 200b4-d5.

²³⁹ Bury, 91.

often speak of wanting things they already have, such as health; thus Socrates specifies that what people really want in such cases is to continue to possess such goods as they already have. In this sense, both *ἐπιθυμία* and *βούλησις* indicate something about our relationship to beloved objects with respect to time and our being *in* time. The beloved object of which we are *ἐνδεής* in these instances is one which we have already but which we recognize as good and so wish to continue to have through time. The *ἔνδεια* inherent in the structure of Eros, then, is revealed to be present even if Eros is spoken of or understood in terms of *ἐπιθυμία* or *βούλησις*, and this further emphasizes the intentional and desiderative sense of Eros as always moving toward that of which it is *ἐνδεής*. It is in terms of *ἐπιθυμία* and *βούλησις* that the relation of Eros to lack (*ἔνδεια*) is first established.²⁴⁰

The usage of *βούλησις* in this section of the *Symposium* suggests that it designates a rational desire. Socrates first uses *βούλομαι* in his examination of Agathon when he begins to speak of different sorts of objects that are desired—here health, strength, and wealth. These are not the desires associated with the *ἐπιθυμητικόν* of the *Republic*,²⁴¹ though neither are they the desires proper to the philosophical part. Nonetheless, a desire for continued health indicates an awareness of self and an awareness of self as persisting through time that would be for Plato singular to a rational being. This indicates that the objects of *βούλησις*, at least in this passage from the *Symposium*, are the objects that can

²⁴⁰ *Symp.* 200a-c.

²⁴¹ W. Joseph Cummins, “Eros, Epithumia, and Philia in Plato,” *Apeiron* 15 (June 1981), 13-14.

only be desired by a rational nature.²⁴² This is significant not only because of its contribution to the conception of Eros as intermediate, but also because of its temporal relation to *ἔνδεια*. If we recall Kosman's point that we are *ἐνδεής* with respect to our own nature, we find that this conception of lack is especially appropriate to our rational awareness of our being in time; for it is our rational desire to continue being healthy, wealthy, strong, or virtuous that follows from our awareness of our future possibilities.

Ἐπιθυμία, in contrast to *βούλησις*, is typically linked to desires associated with the body and with those desires humans share with beasts. When Socrates draws attention to the fact that desire ceases as soon as the desired object is attained, he seems to be particularly concerned with these bodily desires. If limited to this model, the explanation of Eros will be unable to account for the human ability to love an object even once it is acquired, making the common human regard for things such as health, family, and well-being quite inexplicable. Such a model of Eros has the further problem of presenting Eros as temporally insatiable and, in failing to identify different kinds of beloved objects according to their inherent goodness, leads to the conception of Eros as tyrannical. For, as soon as an object is acquired, a new one will come into view, and such a picture of

²⁴² Throughout the dialogues, Plato makes use of several terms (in both verb and noun form) that indicate desire, love, and affection, including *ἐπιθυμία*, Eros, *βούλομαι*, *στέργω*, *ἔρξω*, and *φιλία*. It may be noted that there has been some discussion in the literature of the relations of these various Greek terms to one another in Plato's work. For a discussion of the meanings of *ἐπιθυμία*, Eros, *βούλομαι*, and *φιλία* see W. Joseph Cummins, "Eros, Epithumia, and Philia in Plato," op. cit. and Drew Hyland, "Eros, Epithumia, and Philia in Plato," *Phronesis* 13 (1968): 32-46. For a broader discussion of Plato on desire, see Charles Kahn, "Plato's Theory of Desire," *Review of Metaphysics* 41 no. 1 (September 1987): 77-103. Kahn gives an interesting account, but curiously states that *ἔρξω* is never used in Plato (79), whereas Leonard Brandwood, *A Word Index to Plato* (Leeds: W. S. Maney and Sons, 1976), 641, indicates that *ἔρξω* and its verbal forms appear in several of Plato's writings.

desire and Eros will result in the sort of Eros proper to the *Republic*'s tyrannical soul.²⁴³ It is clear that this cannot be the proper use of Eros for a human being, as it leads to the destruction of the individual human being rather than its flourishing.

In setting forth the relationships among Eros, ἐπιθυμία, βούλησις, and ἔνδεια, Plato introduces the relationship between Eros and lack.²⁴⁴ This lack is used to articulate the structure of Eros, since its lack indicates the object or state for which the subject wishes, or has desire. In this manner, the discussion of Eros and its relation to ἔνδεια is a preparation for the discussion of Eros as intermediate, and this discussion of Eros as intermediate is a description of the metaphysical structure of Eros as well as the human psychological experience of Eros.

The Structure of Eros

The depiction of Eros as deficient and as having an object introduces the triadic structure of Eros, a structure that emphasizes the relational quality of Eros and its status as intermediate. The elenchus of Agathon and the first major section of Diotima's speech reveal the structure of Eros as intermediate and as an intermediary with the ability to lead the soul to its proper end. The description of Eros as lack is not so much a description of subjective psychological motivation, as an articulation of the metaphysical structure of Eros, a structure that is revealed in the unfolding of the discussion between Socrates and Diotima.

²⁴³ *Respublica* 9. 572d10-574a2.

²⁴⁴ Bury notes "observe that the entire argument here is based on the identification of Eros with ἐπιθυμία (see 205d)" (Bury, 91), and also that "the notion of Eros, it is shown, is equivalent to that of Desire (ἔρως = τὸ ἐπιθυμοῦν)—a quality, not a person" (xxxvi-xxxvii).

An Enquiry into the Senses of Intermediacy Applicable to Eros

The discussion of Eros as intermediate occurs in three distinct moments of the dialogue: (1) the elenchus of Agathon, (2) Diotima's initial questioning of Socrates and discussion of Eros as daimon, and (3) Diotima's explanation of Eros's intermediate nature within the context of the myth of his origins. Diotima's first explicit assertion that Eros is intermediate occurs in the second of these passages in which Eros is called *μεταξύ*, and further described as the intermediate daimon that fills in the middle (*μέσος*) between gods and mortals.²⁴⁵ The elenchus of Agathon, however, sets the stage for this discussion by directing attention to the relational nature of Eros, and is an important step in the development of the understanding of Eros as intermediate. In what follows I will consider what each of these three passages contributes to the understanding of the intermediate nature of Eros. Once this investigation into the different senses of intermediacy is complete, I will proceed to establish what can be concluded from these senses, their order in the dialogue, and other textual evidence.

The discussion of Eros as intermediate begins with Socrates' questioning of Agathon, and is recapitulated and further developed when he recounts his own conversation with Diotima. Socrates' exchange with Agathon first establishes that love is always "of something".²⁴⁶ Having established this much, Socrates then shows that Eros "desire[s] that of which it is the love",²⁴⁷ proceeding to the stronger claim at 200b1 that

²⁴⁶ *Symp.* 200a1.

²⁴⁷ *Symp.* 200a2.

“it’s necessary that this be so: a thing that desires desires something of which it is in need (*ἐνδεῖα*); otherwise, if it were not in need, it would not desire it.” The object of Eros’s desire is beauty.²⁴⁸ All of this leads to the conclusion that Eros cannot be as Agathon described him—beautiful and good—because he desires only what he lacks, and these things are the beautiful and the good.²⁴⁹

R. E. Allen’s comment on this passage argues that it serves to establish the fundamentally relational character of Eros, even though the passage does not adequately distinguish between Eros understood as a relation and the lover himself:

The logic of this argument is obscured by the personification of Eros, and an ambiguity in the word ‘beauty’. Love is a relation. As such, it lacks nothing and desires nothing. It implies, however, privation or lack in the lover. But when one distinguishes love and the lover, this argument to show that Eros is neither good nor beautiful nor divine is inconclusive. The lover, who lacks and is by so much imperfect, cannot be divine. But it does not follow from this that love itself is not divine or good. Plato later recognized this. In the *Phaedrus*, when Socrates comes to describe the upward passage of Eros to the *hyperouranios topos*, he describes it as “a god, or something divine” (242e), since it seeks the divine; and later, when he criticizes the Eros described in his first speech, a love which seeks unworthy objects and leads to evil rather than good, he calls it “sinister” or “left-handed,” a love of ill omen, (*skaios Eros*, 266a).²⁵⁰

Allen’s analysis is revealing in its distinction between personified Eros and Eros considered as a relation, but his claim that the personification of Eros is primarily an obfuscation is not convincing. There is good reason to look more closely at the personification of Eros, for the way in which he is later personified by Diotima is

²⁴⁸ *Symp.* 201a9-10.

²⁴⁹ *Symp.* 201c7-8.

²⁵⁰ Allen, “A Note on the Elenchus of Agathon: *Symposium* 199c-201c,” 460.

foreshadowed by the analysis in the elenchus that establishes his relational quality. This indicates that the relational quality of Eros does not describe merely the subjective and psychological experience of Eros, but also a metaphysical reality, and this metaphysical reality is epitomized in the personification of Eros.²⁵¹ The relational quality of Eros is vividly present in his personification as daimon and through this personification is understood as *μεταξύ*; it is *as μεταξύ* that Eros is the way to be joined or bound to the divine. Even though Eros is described in terms of lack in the elenchus, his essence lies in his mediation between gods and men, without which communication between the two would not be possible, and without which the vision of Beauty would be impossible. The relational and intermediate quality of Eros that is here established prefigures the structure of Eros, a structure that is triadic.

Every instance of Eros involves the lover, the beloved, and the love relationship that binds them together in some way. Anne Carson discusses this triadic structure of Eros as it occurs in a poem of Sappho:

But the ruse of the triangle [in Sappho's poem] is not a trivial mental maneuver. We see in it the radical constitution of desire. For, where Eros is lack, its activation calls for three structural components—lover, beloved and that which comes between them. They are three points of transformation on a circuit of possible relationship, electrified by desire so that they touch not touching. Conjoined they are held apart. The third component plays a paradoxical role for it both connects and separates,

²⁵¹ Dover's remarks regarding the personification of Eros, as well as *Πόρος* and *Πενία*, supports such a reading. The personification of external forces as gods or daimons is a means to articulate the working of these forces in and on human beings; personification is a device for understanding how these forces work. "There is no reason to suppose that Plato found this story [of the origins of Eros] in any earlier writer; the construction of relationships between forces personified as deities is a common Greek way of characterizing those forces (cf. 197d7 n.), and the chief purpose of the story here is to put eros before us as a force which impels us to *seek to acquire*" (Dover, *Symposium*, 141).

marking that two are not one, irradiating the absence whose presence is demanded by Eros.²⁵²

Carson's analysis of the structure of Eros in the above passage is remarkably similar to the structure of Eros that emerges from the elenchus and continues to be developed in the exchange between Socrates and Diotima. In both analyses, the lover and beloved are not sufficient to account for the phenomenon of love; there must be a third element, an intermediary that exists between the lover and beloved, preserving their distinctions while uniting them to one another.²⁵³

The second phase of the discussion of Eros as intermediate occurs when Socrates recounts his own conversation with the priestess Diotima about the nature of love. As Agathon, Socrates had conceived of Eros as "a great god" who "belongs to beautiful things."²⁵⁴ Like Agathon, Socrates was forced to admit that his own speech showed that "Love is neither beautiful nor good."²⁵⁵ Socrates then asks whether this means that Love must be ugly and bad, thinking that this must be the only alternative. But Diotima is quick to show him that Love is not ugly or bad; rather he is in between the two just as

²⁵² Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1986; Dalkey Archive Press edition, 1998), 16.

²⁵³ This conception of a unity that preserves the distinctions between disparate elements that nonetheless form a whole bears some similarity to Heraclitean passages, as for instance, Fr. 10, "Things taken together are whole and not whole, something which is being brought together and brought apart, which is in tune and out of tune; out of all things there comes a unity, and out of a unity all things" (Aristotle *de mundo* 5. 396b20 as quoted in G.S. Kirk, J.E. Raven, and M. Schofield, eds., *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 190.

²⁵⁴ *Symp.* 201e5.

²⁵⁵ *Symp.* 201e5.

‘correct judgment’ is between wisdom and ignorance.²⁵⁶ Eros is identified as *μεταξύ* five times in this passage.²⁵⁷

The conclusion that Love is neither good nor beautiful leads to the conclusion that Love cannot be a god, since all gods are beautiful and happy.²⁵⁸ To be happy is to “possess good and beautiful things.”²⁵⁹ Love “needs good and beautiful things, and that’s why he desires them—because he needs them”²⁶⁰, so cannot be a god. Repeating his earlier mistake, Socrates concludes from this that Love must be a mortal, but is quickly redirected by Diotima, who states that Love is in between (*μεταξύ*) the mortal and the immortal, a great spirit or daimon. It is important to note at this point that Eros’s intermediate status does not necessarily indicate that he is situated between opposites that mutually exclude one another; this is evident by Diotima’s reproof of Socrates when he assumes that if Eros is not ‘x’ then Eros must be the opposite of ‘x’. Eros’s lack of beauty does not render him ugly, but situates him at a point between these two extremes, as if on a continuum whose endpoints are the ugly and the beautiful. The further implications of this description will be discussed below.

The role of Eros is epitomized in Diotima’s description of the power (*δύναμις*) of daimons, for the nature of a daimon here described is to be not simply in between or intermediate, but *intermediary*:

²⁵⁶ *Symp.* 202a2-9.

²⁵⁷ *Symp.* 202a2, 202a9, 202b5, 202d11, 202e1.

²⁵⁸ *Symp.* 202b10-d5.

²⁵⁹ *Symp.* 202c10-11.

²⁶⁰ *Symp.* 202d1-2.

They [daimons] 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.²⁶¹

This description of the work of daimons reveals several things about the nature of Eros. Their actions are described by the verbs *ἐρμηνεύω* and *διαπορθεύω*; on the one hand they are interpreters or messengers, and on the other their action is likened to the ferrymen who provide transport across rivers. The verb *ἐρμηνεύω* alludes to the god Hermes, who carries messages for the gods. The verb *διαπορθεύω* is used primarily to designate the crossing of a river, and may allude more specifically to “the office of the *πορθεύς*, Charon, being ‘animas e terra ad sedes deorum transvehere’.”²⁶² The distinct meaning of the two verbs indicates that the work of Eros is not limited to carrying messages from men to gods, but extends to leading souls to the gods.²⁶³ The daimons are

²⁶¹ *Symp.* 202e3-7.

²⁶² “For the term *ἐρμηνεύειν* to describe the mediating office of *δαίμονες*, cp. *Epin.* 985 B *ἐρμηνεύεσθαι (δαίμονας) πρὸς ἀλλήλους τε καὶ τοὺς...θεοὺς πάντας τε καὶ πάντα.* Hommel bids us take *ἐρμηνεῦον* with *ἄνθρ. τὰ παρὰ θεῶν* (as “*eiusdem atque Ἐρμῆς radicis*”) and *διπορθεύον* with *θεοῖς τὰ παρ; ἀνθρώπων* (the office of the *πορθεύς*, Charon, being “*animas e terra ad sedes deorum transvehere*”). This is probably right; but in any case it is a mistake to regard the two words [*ἐρμηνεύειν* and *διαπορθεύω*] as synonymous, as do L. and S. (*s. v. διαπορθεύω*, “*to translate from one tongue into another, to interpret*”)” (Bury, 98).

²⁶³ Remarking on the intermediate and daimonic status of Eros, Santas writes “Plato does not make his attitude explicit towards the main themes in Eryximachus’ speech. We may note that in Socrates’ view (presumably Plato’s own), specific Eros is essentially connected with begetting or creativity, and that it extends beyond sexuality. But in Plato’s theory the lover is always a human being, and Eros mediates not between opposites (such as the beautiful and the ugly or the good and the bad), but rather between ‘intermediates’ (what is neither beautiful nor ugly) and the good or the beautiful” (*Plato and Freud*, 18). But it is clear that Plato does not have romantic love as his paradigm here, especially prior to making any distinction between generic and specific Eros (if indeed this exists in the manner claimed by Santas). The elucidation of the intermediate role of Eros draws upon a Greek tradition of mantic possession by divine forces which

further presented as filling up (*συμπληρώω*) the space between gods and men, and thus binding (*συνδέω*) the extremes together. This is cosmologically necessary, since gods and men cannot mix with each other.²⁶⁴ On both the individual level and the cosmic level, then, daimons serve as intermediates that join together the mortal (*θνητός*) and the immortal (*ἀθάνατος*).²⁶⁵

lead the souls of men to act in certain ways, and upon mystery religions as evidenced in several places by Plato's language; it seems the intermediaries most natural to such a context are those that can go between men and gods. It makes no sense to talk of intermediates between intermediates since intermediates typically arise only in contexts of discussions of contraries or opposites that are perceived to be unable to both be in the same way at the same time.

²⁶⁴ *Symp.* 203a1-2.

²⁶⁵ It is perhaps natural to wonder at this point whether Eros's intermediate existence is between sets of opposites that absolutely exclude each other. It is, of course, difficult to know whether Plato intended to adhere strictly to such a doctrine of opposites here, but his language emphasizes intermediacy, not opposition (e.g. “*μή τοίνυν ἀνάγκαζε ὁ μὴ καλὸν ἔστιν αἰσχρὸν εἶναι, μηδὲ ὁ μὴ ἀγαθὸν, κακόν. οὕτω δὲ καὶ τὸν Ἔρωτα, ἐπειδὴ αὐτός ὁμολογεῖς μὴ εἶναι ἀγαθὸν μηδὲ καλόν, μηδὲν τι μᾶλλον οἴου δεῖν αὐτὸν αἰσχρὸν καὶ κακὸν εἶναι, ἀλλὰ τι μεταξύ, ἔφη, τούτοιον*” (*Symp.* 202b1-5)). In fact, the tendency toward assigning one opposite to a thing because it is said not to be the other opposite is precisely what Diotima criticizes at 202b1-5. Further insight into Plato's use of intermediates and their relation to opposites may be found in the following remarks by R. E. Allen. “Plato uses the term intermediate in at least two distinguishable senses. Sometimes intermediates are described as having a share of opposite qualities...in another sense, intermediates instead of possessing both opposites possess neither” (Allen, *Symposium*, 49). “If intermediates are things that may have opposite qualities, it is unhelpful to explicate intermediates in terms of the Square of Opposition and the distinction between contraries and contradictories; the Square, after all, has to do with statement relations, not the things statements are about. If Eros is not beautiful, it does not follow, according to Diotima's account, that Eros is ugly; so beauty and ugliness are not contradictories, since if both cannot be true, it does not follow that one must be true (201e-202a). Are beauty and ugliness then contraries, in that both cannot be true but neither may be true? But contrariety does not obtain if the same things may be both beautiful and ugly. Perhaps then intermediates are subcontraries, in that both may be true. But subcontrariety does not obtain if the same thing may be neither beautiful nor ugly, that is, if it is not the case that at least one is true. Again, where subcontrariety obtains, I propositions are convertible, but O propositions distribute their predicates and are not convertible. This

Diotima's further explanation of the relationship among these three kinds of being elucidates the role of the daimonic in human knowledge about the divine and human practices with regard to the divine.

It is through this that the whole expertise of the seer works its effects, and that of priests, and of those concerned with sacrifices, rites, spells, and the whole realm of the seer and of magic. God does not mix with man; through this it is that there takes place all intercourse and conversation of gods with men, whether awake or asleep; and the person who is wise about such things is a spirit-like man, while the one who is wise in anything else, in relation to one or other sort of expertise or manual craft, is vulgar. These spirits, then, are many and of all sorts, and one of them is Love himself.²⁶⁶

If we are to take Diotima's claims seriously, we must recognize in this passage that the work of priests and seers, and all human practices designed to garner divine favor, are dependent upon daimons for their efficacy. Without the mediation of daimons, all such practices would be in vain. This is a consequence of the radically different natures of gods and men; because they are opposites, they can only touch through an intermediary. Taken with Diotima's further assertion that there are many different kinds of daimons, we can understand the *δαιμόνιος ἀνὴρ* to be like the particular daimon he knows or follows. The myths of the *Republic*, *Phaedo*, and *Phaedrus* depict the souls of men following daimons.²⁶⁷ In both the *Republic* and the *Phaedo*, the individual soul chooses a daimon to follow, and in the *Phaedrus*, the soul possessed by Eros follows in the train of a

shows that it is a root of confusion to identify opposites with predicates; opposites are not true or false of some subject" (Allen, *Symposium*, 49, n. 81).

²⁶⁶ *Symp.* 202e7-203a7.

²⁶⁷ *Resp.* 617e1, 620e1-621b2, *Phd.* 107d5-108c8, 114b6-c8, *Phdr.* 252c1-253c1.

particular god, and becomes like the god he has followed.²⁶⁸ In becoming like the daimon it follows, the soul moves closer to divinity. Diotima's assertion that one who is wise about daimons is a *δαιμόνιος ἀνὴρ* affirms this, for a human who has become like a daimon is closer to and more like the gods; one becomes like the objects one knows. As Eros is himself a daimon, the soul that follows Eros will become like the daimon himself, who is described in the subsequent text of the dialogue.

The third phase of development of Eros as intermediate begins with Socrates enquiring into the parentage of Eros.²⁶⁹ This prompts Diotima's mythical account of Eros's origin, which she uses to explain the intermediate nature of Eros, who unites the disparate characteristics of his parents while preserving their distinct identities. It is noteworthy that the discussion of the intermediary role of Eros is prior to Diotima's mythical account of the parentage of Eros, for this account further explains the nature of Eros as intermediary. In this sense, this examination of the intermediate nature of Eros is preparatory, for it helps the reader to properly understand the myth of Eros's origin. Diotima explains that Eros was conceived on the day that Aphrodite was born, during the celebration held by the gods to celebrate her birth.²⁷⁰

When they had feasted, Penia 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

²⁶⁸ *Resp.* 617e1, 620e1-621b2, *Phd.* 107d5-108c8, 114b6-c8, *Phdr.* 252c1-253c1.

²⁶⁹ *Symp.* 203b1-204c6.

²⁷⁰ *Symp.* 203b2-3.

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.²⁷¹

The parents of Eros, while perhaps not precisely opposites,²⁷² follow the pattern of elements that exclude one another that have been set forth in the preceding passages as the poles between which Eros exists. Eros is here presented as the consequence of the union of *Πενία*, or Poverty, and *Πόρος*, or Resource. Eros is presented as in between these two extremes—one that is without resource (*ἄπορος*) and one that is resource itself (though, notably, not wealth itself). As the child of these two, Eros is not simply a midpoint between two extremes, but shares in the qualities of both his parents; for, as Diotima tells Socrates, Eros's "lot in life is set to be like" that of his parents.²⁷³ Insofar as Eros resembles his mother, *Πενία*, he is "always poor (*πένης*)" and "always living with Need (*ἐνδεία*)"; he is "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."²⁷⁴ But all of these deficiencies are joined with the more positive characteristics of Eros's father, *Πόρος*, who bequeaths to his offspring the character of "a schemer after the beautiful and

²⁷¹ *Symp.* 203b3-c5.

²⁷² The meanings of *Πόρος* and *Πενία*, as well as the significance of the myth for understanding the nature of Eros are discussed in chapter two.

²⁷³ *Symp.* 203c6.

²⁷⁴ *Πρῶτον μὲν πένης αἰεὶ ἐστὶ, καὶ πολλοῦ δεῖ ἀπαλός τε καὶ καλός, οἷον οἱ πολλοὶ οἴονται, ἀλλὰ σκληρὸς καὶ αὐχμηρὸς καὶ ἀνυπόδητος καὶ ἄοικος, χαμαιπετὴς αἰεὶ ὢν καὶ ἄστρωτος, ἐπὶ θύραις καὶ ἐν ὁδοῖς ὑπαίθριος κοιμῶμενος, τὴν τῆς μητρὸς φύσιν ἔχων, αἰεὶ ἐνδεία ξύνοικος* (*Symp.* 203c5-d3). "ἀνυπόδητος... ἄστρωτος. These, too, are characteristics of the Socratic (and Cynic) way of life" (Bury, 102).

the good; he is brave, impetuous, and intense, an awesome hunter, always weaving snares, resourceful in his pursuit of intelligence, a lover of wisdom through all his life, a genius with enchantments, potions, and clever pleadings.”²⁷⁵

Diotima continues to apply these characteristics in order to explain Eros’s intermediate status with respect to the same sets of extremes she cited in her initial exchange with Socrates: immortal and mortal, wisdom (*σοφία*) and ignorance (*ἀμαθία*), beautiful and ugly, good and bad. The intermediate status of Eros with respect to the beautiful and the good turns on his status as intermediate between wisdom and ignorance—as philosopher—for it is as the supreme instance of beauty and goodness that wisdom is desired. Diotima explains to Socrates that Eros is neither wise nor ignorant, but again as a consequence of his ancestry—a mother “not wise and without resource”, a father “wise and resourceful”—between these extremes. But this intermediacy is given more explanation, for it is clear that the ignorant person cannot even desire wisdom, having no knowledge that he lacks it; similarly, it is clear that those who are wise—the gods—do not desire what they already have. To be a lover of wisdom, then, is to be one that has some idea of one’s own deficiency, else there would be no movement toward the filling of that deficiency. But this deficiency need not be understood as a void that needs filling by some external object; it might be understood as the deficiency of a being that has not yet fully actualized its potential, as the acorn has not yet grown into the oak tree. But the Eros-daimon does not seem quite to fit the example of the acorn, for the things he seeks—wisdom and beauty—are indeed outside of him; nonetheless, he cannot be said to acquire wisdom or beauty in manner that makes these common objects his own

²⁷⁵ *Symp.* 203d4-8.

possession in a way that excludes another person's having it. The "objects" the Eros-daimon pursues are immaterial, so his possession of these objects will be fundamentally different from the kind of possession that would belong to a lover of material goods, whose consumption of these goods renders them necessarily his own to the exclusion of others. If the Eros-daimon comes to have some share of wisdom or beauty or goodness, these beloved objects must come to be in him in spite of maintaining existence elsewhere. Thus, if the void of Eros becomes filled, it is filled in an immaterial manner, much like the filling up of the soul that is described in the *Republic*.²⁷⁶

On the Diverse Ways of Being Intermediate

In each of the passages I have discussed, Eros is described in his role as intermediate. The question of just what sort of intermediate Eros is intended to be, however, remains. From what we have seen thus far, Eros might be understood to be intermediate in any of the following senses: (1) as simply existing in between two extremes, but partaking of neither,²⁷⁷ as the daimon seems to exist between the good and bad, the beautiful and the ugly;²⁷⁸ (2) as existing between two extremes while sharing in the natures of both, and as such, of a mixed or blended nature, as the daimon-Eros exists as both *πόθος* and *πενία*;²⁷⁹ (3) as binding together two apparently disparate or unmixable

²⁷⁶ *Resp.* 585b9-c1.

²⁷⁷ The *Republic*'s account of different kinds of pleasure identifies a state intermediate between pleasure and pain, which is the absence of both (*Resp.* 9. 583b1-585b1).

²⁷⁸ *Symp.* 201e10-202b5.

²⁷⁹ *Symp.* 203b6-204b5.

elements, e.g. opposites, and thus as mediator, as the daimon exists between men and gods,²⁸⁰ facilitating communication between them.²⁸¹ In what follows, I will briefly discuss the possible meanings of intermediacy and then proceed to examine how these senses of intermediacy apply to the interpretation of Eros in Diotima's discourse.

The discussion of intermediates, opposites, extremes, and mixture will likely remind the reader of the *Phaedo*'s discussion of opposites—the Hot and the Cold, Life and Death—that cannot mix but must give way to one another. Though this is one important conception of opposites and their relation to one another put forward in the *Phaedo*, it is not the only such account provided there. Furthermore, the discussion of intermediates and the extremes between which they lie in the *Symposium* is importantly different from the discussion of the *Phaedo*. First, as Plato discusses what sort of thing Eros is, and describes him as intermediate and daimon, he does so without recourse to the language of Forms or to opposites that do not yield to one another. Rather, Diotima pointedly remarks that Eros does not have to be the opposite of what he is not. Second, Plato himself talks about intermediates in a variety of ways, both in the *Phaedo* and in the *Symposium*, so there is no *prima facie* reason to employ the *Phaedo*'s last account of opposites to the interpretation of the *Symposium*'s account of intermediates.²⁸² Third,

²⁸⁰ *Symp.* 202e2-203a7.

²⁸¹ This last sense especially is suggestive of the intermediate as effecting participation, the means of mortals participating in the life of the divine.

²⁸² The Presocratic philosophers take a variety of positions with regard to opposites, intermediates, mixture, and blending, some of which will be discussed in an effort to understand better the position that Plato is articulating in the *Symposium*. A full treatment of these issues, however, is beyond the scope of the current investigation. For a treatment of Plato's use of intermediates, however, the interested reader may consult

Diotima's development of Eros's intermediacy indicates that the different senses of intermediacy she includes do not exclude one another, but all contribute to the account of the nature of Eros.

The meaning and implications of Eros's intermediacy in the *Symposium* are also difficult to determine because of the diverse conceptions of intermediates in the thought of Plato's predecessors, contemporaries, and successors. As Souilhé notes in his study of intermediates, the concept of intermediate is closely related to and sometimes used interchangeably with the concepts of mean or middle, and measure (*μέσος* and *μέτριος*).²⁸³ The term '*μέσος*' designates not only the middle or being in the middle, but also the *state* of being in the middle, i.e. moderation.²⁸⁴ It is found in discussions of mathematics and music, as well as discussions of proper proportion in virtue.²⁸⁵ Its related verbal forms include *μεσώω*, "to form the middle, be in or at the middle" and *μεσύνω*, "to keep the middle or mean between two" or "to stand midway, to be neutral".²⁸⁶ Similarly, the term '*μέτριος*' designates proper proportion, the mean or middle state and so also moderation; and the related '*μέτρον*' designates both the standard of measure and proper proportion.²⁸⁷

Joseph Souilhé's *La Notion Platonicienne d'Intermédiaire dans la Philosophie des Dialogues*.

²⁸³ Souilhé, 16; Guthrie also notes this tendency. The various senses of intermediate, relation, and opposites identified by Aristotle at *Metaphysics* 5. 10. 1018a20-26 provide further evidence of this.

²⁸⁴ Liddell, Scott, and Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*.

²⁸⁵ Liddell, Scott, and Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*; John Burnet, *Greek Philosophy: Thales to Plato*, Part 1 (London: Macmillan, 1914), 50.

²⁸⁶ Liddell, Scott, and Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*.

²⁸⁷ Liddell, Scott, and Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*.

The term ‘μεταξύ’ designates more specifically that which lies between, though it also designates the middle.²⁸⁸ As we have seen above, there are several corresponding senses of intermediacy present in the *Symposium*, and both μέσος and μεταξύ appear in Diotima’s discourse.

It might seem that Eros, especially in the first two passages considered above, is most properly understood as existing between a set of opposites, in neither of which he shares; but in fact there are several senses of intermediacy utilized in the gradual development of the nature of Eros as an intermediate. In the first passage considered above, he is presented as in between good and bad, beautiful and ugly, on account of his deficiency. He is said to have “no portion (ἄμοιρας) of good and beautiful things.”²⁸⁹ Eros shares in neither of the extremes between which he is situated, and his place is best described as a midpoint between extremes. In the second passage, his relationship to the mortal (θνητός) and immortal (ἀθάνατος) is described as similar to the good and bad, beautiful and ugly; “It’s as in the previous cases...he’s in between the mortal and the immortal.”²⁹⁰ But this latter point moves the dialogue forward to speak of the power of Eros insofar as he is a daimon, and here his intermediacy takes on a new dimension. He is no longer merely a midpoint between extremes; as daimon he provides the middle necessary for gods and men to communicate. It is notable that here Eros is no longer presented as in between the mortal (θνητός) and immortal (ἀθάνατος), but as in between

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ *Symp.* 202d5.

²⁹⁰ *Symp.* 202d11-12.

gods (*θεοί*) and men (*ἄνθρωποι*); thus, the new sense of intermediacy is not in conflict with that which preceded it, since the extremes to which Eros bears this relation are different.

This second sense of Eros's intermediacy resembles the intermediacy of the *μέση* or middle tone of the lyre; the *μέση* lies at an equal distance from either of its extremes as Burnet explains in his summary of the Pythagorean analysis of the ratios of the notes of the lyre. This term (*μέση*), writes Burnet

exceeds and is exceeded by the same number, namely 3. It is what is called the arithmetical mean (*ἀριθμητικὴ μεσότης*). On the other hand, the term 8, which represents the note of the *paramesē*, exceeds and is exceeded by the same fraction of the extremes; for $8=12 - 12/3=6 + 6/3$. This was called the subcontrary (*ὑπεναντία*), or later for obvious reasons, the harmonic mean (*ἁρμονικὴ μεσότης*)...Now this discovery of the Mean at once suggests a new solution of the old Milesian problem of opposites. We know that Anaximander regarded the encroachment of one opposite on the other as an "injustice," and he must therefore have held there was a point which was fair to both. That, however, he had no means of determining. The discovery of the Mean suggests that it is to be found in a "blend" (*καῶσις*) of the opposites, which might be numerically determined, just as that of the high and low notes of the octave had been.²⁹¹

As Burnet's exposition shows, the concept of the mean has significance not just in its indication of proportion, but also because it provides an approach to understanding the relationships of different kinds of opposites. It is notable that Aristotle identifies several kinds of opposites at *Metaphysics* V, and this distinction among kinds of opposites is related to the different senses of mean, middle, and intermediacy:

The term 'opposite' is applied to contradictories, and to contraries, and to relative terms, and to privation and possession, and to the extremes from which and into which generation and dissolution take place; and the attributes that cannot be present at the same time in that which is receptive of both, are said to be opposed—either themselves or their constituents.

²⁹¹Burnet, *Greek Philosophy*, 48.

Grey and white colour do not belong at the same time to the same thing; hence their constituents are opposed.²⁹²

The opposites at issue in the passage from Burnet above are the low and high; finding the middle between these results in *ἁρμονία*. The discussion of the parts of the soul in *Republic* IV makes use of this language, explicitly identifying *δύμος* as *μέσος* situated between the extremes of the low and the high.²⁹³ The sense of the middle in the *Republic* is quite similar to that articulated at *Symposium* 202e1-203a7, where Eros is first described as daimon and the daimonic is said not only to exist as intermediate between gods and men, but to fill in the middle (*μέσος*). In both cases, the middle exists not just to separate the extremes, but to allow communication between them.

Burnet's discussion of intermediates draws attention to several significant points. First, his discussion of the foundations of the concept of the intermediate in Greek mathematics highlights its relationship to opposites, extremes, and proportional relationships among these. Thus, any discussion of an intermediate as such will involve extremes, often opposites between which it is situated, and a discussion of whether and under what circumstances the extremes are mixable. This is, indeed, the manner in which Diotima's discourse proceeds, by first identifying the intermediate, then the opposites or extremes between which it lies, and finally by examining the relationships among these.

²⁹²Aristotle *Metaph.* 5. 10. 1018a20-26.

²⁹³“La terme se trouve exprimé à 443 D. où l'on parle de la *δικαιοσύνη* qui doit harmoniser les trois parties, soit dans la ville, soit dans l'individu: *ὅρους τρεῖς ἁρμονίας ἀτεχνῶς, νεάτης τε καὶ ὑπάτης καὶ μέσης..... συνδήσαντα*. C'est aux trios cordes qui formaient l'ancienne échelle musicale que sont comparées les facultés. Le *δύμος* correspond à la *μεσὴ*” (Souilhé, 96, n. 205).

The intermediate, on Burnet's account, arises in response to the difficulties presented by opposites, especially those that are, or appear to be, mutually exclusive. In response to these difficulties, at least two distinct conceptions of combination arise. The first is that of blending (*κρᾶσις*), and appears in the *Symposium* in the speech of Erixymachus. In his account of Eros, opposite qualities present within the patient are adjusted to bring about a balance or *ἄρμονία*. This adjustment of opposites results in a proportionality that achieves the well-being of the patient. Opposites in this example are not the sort that are mutually exclusive, i.e., they are not as the Forms of Life and Death in the *Phaedo* that do not admit the existence of the other. The situation in the material particulars is importantly different, since individual hot and cold elements may blend in order to achieve a point intermediate between these opposites that is the proper amount of each, e.g. warmth is a proportion of hot and cold. Erixymachus does not even speak of mixing opposites, but rather of the blending (*κρᾶσις*) of them that achieves *ἄρμονία*. While he does not, in his speech, draw a clear distinction between mixture and blending, his description of the opposites at work in the body of a patient indicate that the opposites do not maintain distinct identities while existing in close proximity to one another. Rather, the blending of the natures of hot and cold produce warmth, what is intermediate between these two extremes.²⁹⁴

Erixymachus's description of good Eros as balance and proportion is perhaps as much Pythagorean in its inspiration as it is Empedoclean or Heraclitean, and suggests a

²⁹⁴ In addition to this, in the medical analogy that Erixymachus here provides, the intermediate would be peculiar to the individual, just as normal body temperature, while generally about the same throughout the human population, may vary slightly from one person to another.

distinction between the conceptions of *κρᾶσις* or blending and that of mixture (*μίγμα* or *μίξις*, both derived from *μίγνυμι*). Where the goal of combining opposites is to achieve a *ἁρμονία*, the opposites must join together and blend in order to form the middle.²⁹⁵

Blending is, perhaps, a special instance of mixture. At this point, we can distinguish *κρᾶσις* from mixture by noting that *κρᾶσις* creates something new by achieving *ἁρμονία*. The blending of hot and cold, for example, produce an intermediate like warmth. The blending of high and low, strictly speaking a proportion of high to low, yields a new note, a middle term. Significantly, however, this new term is achieved by the blending of the high and the low, and has its being in the proportion itself. Such a middle is health for the body, whose being also depends on the proper proportion itself. The distinction between *κρᾶσις* and *μίγμα* is significant, for in the first, a new entity is created and maintained by the blending of opposites. In the second passage discussed above, however, Eros is identified as a daimon that joins men to the gods precisely because men and gods cannot mix. The relationship between gods and men is presented as that of opposites or extremes that exist in close proximity to one another, held apart by an intermediate, but not yielding their individual identities.²⁹⁶ This suggests that the

²⁹⁵ As Burnet notes, however, in Greek music, notes would not be played simultaneously, but in sequence; the harmony thus expressed is one spread out in time. This allows for the application of the conceptions of harmony and proportion to things that occur in time, like the changing of the seasons. Overall, the movement from hot to cold, from generation to decay, describes temporal proportion.

²⁹⁶ Empedocles suggests such a relationship when he contrasts the way that water mixes with wine so that the two are no longer separable with the way that oil does not mix with wine, but remains distinct from it. “<Water> Has a greater affinity with wine, but with olive oil it is unwilling ,<to mix>” (Philoponus, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Generation of Animals* 123.19-20 as quoted in *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Thales to Aristotle*, eds. S. Marc Cohen, Patricia Curd, and C.D.C. Reeve, 3rd edition (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2005), 53).

intermediate status of Eros is what allows men to mix with gods in a manner that is akin to participation. The daimonic, being able to communicate with both gods and men, is able to join them together. Mixture, then, has a distinct sense, and is one possible way of describing how *μᾶζεξις* occurs.²⁹⁷

From this analysis of the mean, the significance of intermediates as mathematical objects becomes more evident; intermediates are not merely matters for mathematicians and musicians, for their ability to express relationships between various kinds of opposites is not limited to the mathematical realm. This point is made clear in Souilhé's *La Notion Platonicienne d'Intermédiaire*, which distinguishes among the psychological, moral, political, and cosmogonical senses of intermediates in Plato's dialogues and in Plato's predecessors.

Thus far, we have seen that the initial exposition of Eros as in need of the beautiful and the good emphasizes his relational character and introduces the triadic structure of Eros. Eros's intermediacy is not here presented as a mixture or unification of the opposites between which he lies, but rather as a point between them. This, of course, does not mean that Eros bears no relation to these extremes. While Eros is not a mixture of these extremes, his place between them emphasizes that his relation to the extremes is essential to his nature. The very fact that Eros is neither good nor bad makes it necessary for Diotima to clarify, later in her speech, the proper use of Eros. The establishment of the intermediate nature of Eros, however, is what positions her to embark upon such a

²⁹⁷ Souilhé, 245. Crombie notes that in the *Sophist* the verb *meignusthai* is used, among other terms, to describe the participation relation between forms and particulars (I. M. Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines* (New York: Humanities Press, 1962-3), 389).

discussion. In identifying Eros as an intermediate, she points to a problem with Eros generally: it may lead to either good or bad. This indicates, as we shall see in the next chapter, that the human use of Eros is of primary importance. Nonetheless, though Diotima acknowledges that Eros in itself is neither good nor bad, she maintains that it is always of or directed toward the good and the beautiful. It is this very fact, after all, that has revealed Eros's intermediate nature. This must mean, then, that when a person has Eros for the bad or the ugly, Eros is badly directed.

In the second passage considered above, Eros is again presented as in between the extremes of good and bad, beautiful and ugly, but further positioned in between the poles immortal and mortal, wisdom and ignorance; his position with respect to divinity and knowledge is added to the discourse. Eros's relationship to these new extremes is slightly different from those identified in the first passage, for to be a daimon, between immortal and mortal, is to have a share of what belongs to each in a way that is similar to what the person with true opinion has. The person with true opinion is said to have something of the real, but without being able to give an account of it. Eros's position with respect to mortality and wisdom is similar. His daimonic nature is not the same as the immortal nature of the gods; yet he is not subject to death as are mortal beings. He has a kind of immortality, since he does not die, but it is not the immortality of the gods, who do not merely exist forever, but who also are not subject to change and motion. This peculiar kind of intermediacy is more fully developed in the passage immediately following Diotima's account of Eros's origins, and is discussed below.

The most significant sense of intermediate in this second passage is the identification of Eros as daimon. It is in this passage that Eros is first called daimon and

that the man who truly understands the daimonic is called a *δαιμόνιος ἀνὴρ*; here that Eros is portrayed as moving between gods and men, even as ferrying prayers and gifts of men across the chasm that divides mortal from immortal, and so as binding the all to itself; here that Eros is clearly a mediating intermediary. This sense of intermediacy corresponds to the *μέσση*. Just as the *μέσση* must lie between the high and the low, so also must Eros lie between the gods and men. The sense of intermediacy here is of the intermediate that joins together elements that otherwise could not touch. The opposites here are mutually exclusive, and the chasm that separates them is filled by intermediates. But by separating the beautiful from the ugly, the intermediate also holds them together. The movement of an individual soul from ignorance to wisdom, from ugliness to beauty, and from mortal existence to immortal existence depends upon the intermediate. This passage presents an account that makes it necessary that the intermediate actually exist if we are to take seriously the metaphysical structure of Eros that Diotima has been propounding. One means of making sense of the reality of intermediates and their metaphysical role in the *Symposium*, is to consider the evidence found in accounts of Plato's mathematical objects.

Both Burnet and Ross present an account of intermediates that is based on Plato's recognition of mathematical objects and thus recognizes the metaphysical importance of intermediates as a link between the sensible and intelligible realms. From the passages examined in section two of this chapter, it is evident that the Eros-daimon is presented as intermediate at least in part to establish a metaphysical continuity between gods and men. But as much as the existence of intermediates is important to establish this continuity, so

also is it necessary to adequately describe the phenomena of human experience. Ross captures this necessity in his comment on the *Phaedo* in the following passage:

It would be a mistake to describe Plato as having, either at this or at any stage of his development, made a complete bifurcation of the universe into Ideas and sensible things. For one thing, we have the casual reference to ‘equals themselves’—an allusion to mathematical entities which are neither Ideas nor sensible things, an allusion which paves the way for the doctrine of the ‘intermediates’. Plato very likely at this stage did not himself appreciate the significance of his own allusion. But he very certainly recognizes the existence of another type of entity which is neither an Idea nor a sensible thing; for there is a whole section in which he describes soul as akin to the Ideas and not to sensible things in respect of unchangeability, and yet nowhere suggests—and indeed how should he?—that souls are themselves Ideas.²⁹⁸

As Ross notes, it is not only the existence of mathematical objects, but the existence of other things that appear to defy classification as sensible or ideal that calls for a new category. Daimons, being immaterial but many in number, belong neither to the sensible nor to the ideal realm;²⁹⁹ their converse with both gods and humans places them between these classes of beings. The discussion of the parts of the soul in *Republic IV* centers around the same problem, namely that the description of the observable powers of the soul yields the identification of a power that is neither purely rational nor purely irrational.³⁰⁰ This third power lies between the extremes that are opposed to one another, and is ultimately seen to mediate between them. The human soul itself provides another instance of this phenomenon, for it seems to exist in a sensible medium while persisting

²⁹⁸ David Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 25-26.

²⁹⁹ The fact that daimons are seen as moving and existing as part of the cosmos, rather than outside or of beyond it, provides further reason to exclude daimons from the sensible or ideal realms.

³⁰⁰ *Respublica* 4. 435b1-441b1; cf. Souilhé, 95-97.

through change in a manner that suggests it is more like the eternal and unchangeable Forms. The ability of the soul to interact with both the material and immaterial realms suggests that it is itself intermediate between these extremes and that this intermediacy allows for its mixing with each. Again, the observable phenomena provide evidence for an underlying metaphysical reality.

Aristotle's concise summary of Plato's view of mathematical objects as intermediate between the sensible and intelligible provides a framework for understanding the metaphysical importance of Eros's intermediacy:³⁰¹

Further, besides sensible things and Forms he says there are the objects of mathematics, which occupy an intermediate position, differing from sensible things in being eternal and unchangeable, from Forms in that there are many alike, while the Form itself is in each case unique.³⁰²

As Aristotle notes, mathematical objects are distinct from Forms because there are many of them rather than one, i.e. there are many different circles studied by the mathematicians, though none of these are circularity itself. If we apply this framework to gods, humans, and daimons in the manner suggested by Diotima, daimons exist in a manner similar to the mathematician's circles. According to the myths found in the *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, and *Republic*, there are at least as many daimons as there are souls,

³⁰¹ My purpose here is not to attribute to Plato some unwritten doctrine, but rather to recognize the important influence of Greek mathematical thought on Plato and to make use of Greek mathematical thought in my interpretation of the *Symposium*. It is not necessary to subscribe to the view that Plato's later philosophy derived all things from the One and the indeterminate dyad in order to recognize the presence and use of mathematical objects as intermediate between sensible particulars and intelligible Forms in dialogues from the middle period. This is evident in Ross's careful study, but also by the recognition that, philosophically speaking, the idea of intermediacy itself emerges among Pre-Socratic thinkers. Further support for the inclusion of intermediates in Plato's metaphysics is found in the *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, and *Republic*.

³⁰² *Metaph.* 1. 6. 987b14-23.

for each soul has its own daimon to follow.³⁰³ Because there are many diverse instances of daimons, they are not *τό δαιμόνιον* itself; on the other hand, daimons, as immaterial beings, do not belong to the sensible realm either. Just as the mathematician's circles are not enmattered, so also are daimons free of matter; just as the mathematician's circles are different from one another in having radii of varying lengths, so also are daimons different from one another in having different orientations toward different gods (e.g. Aphrodite or Zeus). Just as the existence of the mathematician's circles does not preclude, but rather necessitates the existence of circularity itself, so also the existence of the Eros-daimon does not preclude the existence of a Form of Eros. If Eros itself exists as a Form and the Eros-daimons that are actual in the many different instances of love exist as intermediates, then there is one primary instance of Eros, and it may be understood as a real relation. There is no reason to assume that Eros cannot exist as a Form because it is a relation, since relations such as equality, sameness and difference are also identified as Forms.³⁰⁴ The proper object of Eros as Form is the loveable, that which is good and beautiful; so much is stated in Diotima's discourse. This, then, articulates the ideal Eros, and the many manifestations of Eros that exist in the daimonic realm or the sensible realm approximate this ideal Form to a greater or lesser degree. This allows also for the existence of many distinct instances of Eros as an intermediate (metaphysically) and accounts for instances of misdirected Eros and the variety of loveable objects among human beings. This metaphysical understanding of intermediates, then, helps to elucidate

³⁰³ *Resp.* 617e1, 620e1-621b2, *Phd.* 107d5-108c8, 114b6-c8, *Phdr.* 252c1-253c1.

³⁰⁴ *Phd.* 74a1-b1; cf. *Soph.* 254b7-255e1 where relations such as sameness and difference are said to be Forms.

the underlying metaphysical structure of Eros that provides the foundation for understanding its use, work, causality, and moral status.

In the third passage, Diotima draws together these different elements of the nature of Eros, presenting them unified in the myth of Eros's origins. It may be true with respect to good and bad, beauty and ugliness, considered absolutely, that Eros cannot be a mixture of these opposites; but it is certainly not the case that Eros is in between the natures of his parents in this sense, for Diotima describes Eros as sharing in the qualities of his parents and inheriting the characteristics of both. In some curious fashion, Eros is able to be poor, but never without resource.

A further sense of intermediacy is suggested by Eros's position between wisdom and ignorance, and as moving toward wisdom. In this sense, the extremes are conceived of as the absolute endpoints of a spectrum; what is intermediate lies at a point on the spectrum in between. Conceived thus, the intermediate may lie at a number of points on the spectrum, closer to or further from either of the absolutes that lie at the extremes.³⁰⁵ This allows Eros to be understood as a moveable intermediary, by which the lover (or philosopher) makes progress toward or falls away from the positive end of the spectrum, or absolute beauty, as he will be described in the ascent passage later on. This sense of the intermediate is expressive of the stages through which something changes on its way to full development; it is the way to completion. This is consonant with Diotima's description of the Eros-daimon as one who knows or finds a way to something, as *Πόρος*.

In another sense, the intermediate status of Eros is evidenced in his life of poverty (*Πενία*). Insofar as he is poor (*πέννης*), he lives the labourer's life, having just enough, but

³⁰⁵ See Guthrie's discussion of intermediates in *History*, 4: 225.

neither excess nor deficiency. His very existence is intermediate between privation and excess; he is never absolutely full, nor absolutely empty. The moderation implanted by poverty is itself an intermediate state, one that is characterized by proper proportion.

A further aspect of this intermediate existence is depicted in Diotima's description of Eros as moving from being in need of something to pursuing something. This aspect of Eros as daimon and *μεταξύ* includes in the conception of Eros a source of motion. The life of Eros is described as one of continual flux, and this reveals also his similarity to sensible being, ever falling short of perfection and fulfillment, but ever striving toward it. This depiction of the life of Eros emphasizes the movement of Eros itself within the human being he possesses, as the human being moves toward fulfillment of the perfections possible for him.³⁰⁶ This constant motion of Eros is described by Diotima as occurring throughout the cosmos and within individual beings.³⁰⁷ Bury's comment on this aspect of Eros's existence distinguishes between the causal effect of Eros in the lover and causal effect of Eros that animates the cosmos:

Lastly, we should notice the emphasis laid on the fluctuating character of Eros, whose existence is a continual ebb and flow, from plenitude to vacuity, from birth to death. By this is symbolized the experience of *τε φιλόκαλος* and the *φιλόσοφος*, who by a law of their nature are incapable of remaining satisfied for long with the temporal objects of their desire and are moved by a divine discontent to seek continually for new sources of gratification. This law of love, by which *τὸ ποριζόμενον ἀεὶ ὑπεκρεῖ*, is parallel to the law of mortal existence by which *τὰ μὲν (ἀεὶ) γίγνεται, τὰ δὲ ἀπόλλυται* (207 D ff.)—a law which controls not merely the physical life but also the mental life (*ἐπιθυμῖαι, ἐπιστήμαι*, etc.). Accordingly the Eros-

³⁰⁶ Aristotle's description of the intermediate in *Metaphysics XI* lends support to this: "that at which a changing thing, if it changes continuously according to its nature, naturally arrives before it arrives at the extreme into which it is changing is *between* (*μεταξύ*)" (*Metaph.* 9. 1068b26-30).

³⁰⁷ *Symp.* 207c5-208b1.

daemon is neither mortal nor immortal in nature (*πέφυκεν* 203 E), neither wise nor foolish, but a combination of these opposites—*σοφὸς-ἀμαθής* and *θνητὸς-ἀθάνατος*—and it is in virtue of this combination that the most characteristic title of Eros is *φιλόσοφος* (which implies also *φιλαθανασία*).³⁰⁸

The motion implanted by Eros is a consequence of his nature as comprising *Πόρος* and *Πενία*. This nature of Eros is a result of his genesis, as Diotima states near the end of her description of his parentage.³⁰⁹ As Souilhé notes, the structure of Eros put forward here suggests that Eros is a product of a genesis that proceeds from the opposites *Πόρος* and *Πενία*, in a way that is similar to the double genesis from opposites described in the *Phaedo*:

Notons la similitude des termes par lesquels Platon décrit l'instabilité d'Eros dans le *Symposion* et la génération des contraires dans *Phédon*. – Eros qui est situé entre deux extrêmes, puisque *οὔτε ὡς ἀθάνατος πέφυκεν οὔτε ὡς θνητός*, reste come flottant et sans cesse en voie de transformation, *ἀλλὰ τοτὲ μὲν τῆς αὐτῆς ἡμέρας θάλλει τε καὶ ζῆ, ὅταν εὐπορήσῃ, τοτὲ δὲ ἀποθνήσκει, πάλιν δὲ ἀναβιώσκειται* (*Symposion* 203E).

Par sa nature, il réalise assez bien la définition des doubles intermédiaires de *Phédon* qui sont des *γενέσεις*, tels que *καταδαρθάνειν* et *ἀνεγείρεσθαι*, *ἀποθνήσκειν* et *ἀναβιώσκεσθαι* (*Phédon*, 71B.C.D.E.), grâce auxquels est possible la transformation des contraires. C'est par un milieu que les absolus passent de l'un à l'autre.³¹⁰

This double genesis gives an account of the metaphysical status of Eros as an intermediate whose being is derived from the genesis of each of the extremes between which he lies. The motion attendant upon Eros is the motion derived from his status as an intermediate.

³⁰⁸ Bury, xlii.

³⁰⁹ *Αἰτία δ' αὐτῶ καὶ τούτων ἡ γένεσις· πατρὸς μὲν γὰρ σοφοῦ ἐστὶ καὶ εὐπόρου, μητρὸς δὲ οὐ σοφῆς καὶ ἀπόρου* (*Symp.* 204b5-7).

³¹⁰ Souilhé, 110.

This last sense of intermediacy, that of the double genesis, indicates the relationship between intermediate status of Eros and the motion imparted by Eros. This relationship is indicated also by the passages depicting Eros as the source of the animation of the cosmos. It is difficult to determine the precise nature of Eros's motion, since it seems, given his intermediate status, to flow from both extremes, and so not to lead exclusively to goodness as the ascent passage seems to suggest. Diotima addresses this, however, when she moves to the next stage of her discourse, in which she addresses the use and work of Eros. It is by means of this discussion of the use and work of Eros that his motion is more fully explained and the implications of this motion for morality and human flourishing are clarified.

CHAPTER FIVE
METAPHYSICS, MOTION, AND MORALITY

In the last chapter, Eros's lack was seen to provide the foundation for his intermediate status. This intermediate status is a central feature of the nature of Eros, and allows for an understanding of Eros at three distinct metaphysical levels: as Form or real relation, as daimon or metaphysical intermediate, and as cosmic force or motion. Though the establishment of the intermediate nature of Eros allows Diotima to incorporate multiple senses of Eros's metaphysical reality into her speech, it also raises some questions about the use of Eros, or the moral consequences of his intermediate nature, and so also about the motion for which Eros is responsible. The various senses of intermediacy we have identified in chapter four show Eros to be bidirectional, since he may move both from man to god and from god to man. But the presentation of the final mysteries of Eros in the ascent passage present a more unidirectional picture of Eros's movement, i.e., it seems that the lover is necessarily led upward, and toward the divine. As we shall see, this is in part because the ascent passage describes the proper use of Eros to achieve *εὐδαιμονία*. It will be the purpose of this chapter to examine the relationship between the metaphysical status of Eros as intermediate and the use that humans make of Eros, and this itself reveals that the motion of Eros is made good use of by humans when directed toward human perfection.

The Metaphysical Status of Eros as Intermediate

The characterization of Eros as daimon and intermediate suggests that Eros has a real existence as a daimon. One notable proponent of this view is Robin, who notes that Eros in the *Symposium* is synthetic, and that his intermediate nature is a consequence of this:

Mais ce n'est pas seulement sur la nature synthétique de l'Amour qu'insiste le *Banquet*, c'est aussi sur sa nature intermédiaire. Cette seconde caractéristique est d'ailleurs étroitement liée à la première: la nature synthétique de l'Amour fait de lui un intermédiaire entre les qualités opposées que cette nature a pour fonction d'unir.³¹¹

Robin continues to argue that as an intermediate, Eros has a real and independent existence, namely as a daimon.³¹² It is notable that Robin's position regarding the metaphysical reality of Eros is not dependent upon the acceptance of the existence of mathematical objects. This position is also held by Plotinus, and though Robin finds that Plotinus is not a reliable source of Plato's original meaning,³¹³ he still maintains that Plato's assertion that Eros is a daimon establishes the metaphysical status of Eros as an independent being. In partial support of his claim that Eros is a daimon, Robin cites the use of daimons in both the Pre-Socratic philosophers and poets, and Plato's other dialogues.³¹⁴ Within the Platonic dialogues themselves, Robin identifies two distinct

³¹¹ Robin, *La Théorie Platonicienne de l'Amour*, 129.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 130.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 127.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 132-3; 132, n. 151. For a discussion of the demonologies developed by Plato's successors, see John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: a study in Platonism, 80BC to AD220* (London: Duckworth, 1977).

kinds of daimons: the soul and the tutelary spirit.³¹⁵ The Eros of the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* is of the latter type, and it is by daimonic possession that one is transformed into a *δαιμόνιος ἀνὴρ*. For Robin, becoming a *δαιμόνιος ἀνὴρ* leads the soul to a keener vision of the Beautiful and so also to the ascent to the vision of Beauty itself; in this sense, Eros is the source of motion toward the Beautiful itself.

In addition to Robin, Rist, Cornford, and Friedlander identify the soul as a daimon.³¹⁶ Where the soul is considered as daimon, it is on the grounds that its rational faculty is like the divine. Though its rational faculty raises the soul toward divinity, its habitation in the body mixes it with mortality. The soul, in this sense, is very like the daimon-Eros described in the *Symposium*, since it binds together the human and the divine. If we bear this in mind, the cathartic regimen of the *Phaedo* that demands of the philosopher a progressive and habitual disassociation from his body follows quite naturally, since it is by this purification from the mortal element that the soul will regain its divinity. When the philosopher frees his soul from its bodily fetters, his soul becomes possessed by a daimon and he has truly a god within him.³¹⁷

It may be the case that Plato intends the Eros-daimon to be identified with the soul in the *Symposium*, but identifying him as a tutelary spirit is an equally viable alternative. Given the passages in the *Phaedo* and the *Phaedrus* that describe the soul as following daimons, it seems plausible that Eros might be one such daimon. The guiding

³¹⁵ Robin, *La Théorie Platonicienne de l'Amour*, 132, n. 151.

³¹⁶ Rist, *Eros and Psyche*, 19; Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology*, 292-3; Friedlander, 1: 37.

³¹⁷ The cathartic regimen of the *Phaedo* and its relationship to Eros is more fully discussed in chapter seven.

power of the daimon is appropriate to the *Symposium*'s description of the lover as being led in the ascent passage. Understanding the Eros-daimon as tutelary spirit rather than soul appears to have one distinct advantage; it maintains the sense that Eros comes to the soul from without, and that, without this divine intervention, the soul would not acquire the vision necessary for its ascent to the divine. What remains true in the *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, and *Symposium*, however, is that the soul must regain its vision of the Forms if it is to draw near to the divine; in the *Phaedo* this is accomplished by the practice for death, and in the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* by association with the Eros-daimon. Regardless of whether the Eros-daimon is here meant to designate the soul, it does seem that Plato intends the Eros-daimon to depict or point to some metaphysical reality.

Allen objects to this interpretation of Eros as having metaphysical reality, as articulated in the positions of Cornford, Robin, and Plotinus, on the grounds that they make an *ὄψία* of Eros:

It will be evident that both Cornford and Robin, like Plotinus, treat Eros as a substance in its own right, an *ὄψία*. Once this is done, it is but a short step to suppose that it is identical with soul, and its identification with self-moving motion in the *Phaedrus* appears to follow as of course. It seems evident that Eros cannot be identified with self-moving motion. For if Eros were a motion, it could not be self-moving: arising in lack, ending with fulfillment, the child of both *Πόθος* and *Πενία*, it is motion *a quo* and *ad quem*. Eros cannot be identified with soul, conceived as self-moving motion, because soul is immortal and Eros implies lack of immortality.

Nor can Eros be said to be moved by its objects. Eros involves futurity: the object of desire is not a presently existing thing, but a future state of affairs involving possession. The thirsty man desires, not water, but to possess water. Since desire implies lack of possession, the object of desire does not exist when desire exists. So the object of desire is peculiarly evanescent: when desire is, it is not; and when desire is not, it is not. Insofar as desire implies possession of an unpossessed object, its object is, and is necessarily, nonexistent. What is nonexistent cannot move anything, either as efficient or as final cause.

If Eros is not a motion, neither is it a “force” nor a “moving fund of energy.” The hydraulic metaphor for desire, as a stream capable of being diverted into other channels is helpful precisely because it states a common-sense truth: that human beings must often choose between gratifying contending kinds of desires, and their choices shape their character. Because desire is a relative, desire is not a substance, as Plotinus had it, nor a force nor a fund of energy, as Cornford had it, nor the soul, as Robin had it; these are metaphors that merely obscure. The ascent to Beauty is, and is explicitly said to be (210A), that of the lover. If we choose to describe this as the ascent of Eros, we do so by virtue of the logical import of a literary fiction, namely, Diotima’s personification of Eros; Eros is the lover qua lover, the lover just insofar as he loves. The lover insofar as he loves is neither a motion nor a force nor a fund of energy; and since he is not, qua lover, immortal, neither is he his soul.³¹⁸

Allen’s argument from the position that Eros is a relation and as such has no independent existence fails on several counts. In the first place, as we have seen, Plato explicitly names Eros as an intermediate, and this implies actual existence. Furthermore, as Souilhé’s analysis shows, this intermediate status provides a means for explaining the motion of Eros “*a quo* and *ad quem*” by understanding it as the double genesis from opposites described in the *Phaedo*. This provides an interpretation of Eros as source of motion that does not entail the identification of Eros with soul; it leaves open the possibility that Eros is something that comes to be in the soul from without. The soul may be self-moving as the *Phaedrus* claims, and yet be acted on by other things. Second, the various senses of intermediate discussed above entail that the intermediate actually exist. Furthermore, the naming of Eros as a daimon supports the view that Eros exists independently. The fact that Eros may be identified with motion, the origin of motion, or the force that binds two things together does not, for Plato, preclude the possibility of its independent existence. As we have seen above, it is both plausible and likely that Eros

³¹⁸ Allen, *Symposium*, 94-95.

exists as Form at the purely intelligible level, as daimon at the intermediate level, and in the motion of the cosmos at the sensible level.

It need not be the case that Plato means for Eros to be understood literally to be a daimon. As we saw in chapter two, Plato's use of mythical elements often do not intend to convey a literal truth, but rather to use a more sensible image to convey meaning that would be difficult to grasp in any other way; the sensible image points to an invisible reality. In the case of the Eros-daimon, this would mean that Eros does have a real existence and its interaction with gods and men is similar to that ascribed to the Eros-daimon in Diotima's speech. The intermediate existence of the Eros-daimon explains the metaphysical ground of the phenomenon of love. The psychological experience of Eros, however, is better conveyed by appealing to the imagery of divine possession; for humans experience Eros as coming to them from without, taking hold of them, and leading them toward certain objects. The image of the Eros-daimon provides Plato with a means of conveying the metaphysical reality of Eros and its structure, as well as the psychological experience of Eros.

The diversity of beloved objects among human beings remains a difficulty on this account of Eros. It seems there is no way of accounting for the fact that human beings choose different kinds of goods to pursue, and the diversity of chosen goods among human beings appears to indicate that Eros arbitrarily directs different people toward different objects. This unresolved difficulty calls our attention to the motion of Eros, and in particular to the relationship between the motion of Eros and its use for human beings.

Thus far we have seen that Eros as intermediate must have a real existence, and that, whether this existence is as rational soul or tutelary spirit, Eros carries with him

motion. Eros is himself a mover in this sense, and because he is a source of motion, he is a catalyst for action. We have seen already that Eros's intermediate nature is bidirectional, since there could not be converse between men and gods if the case were otherwise; indeed, it seems that Eros leads as often to bad as it does to good, and this remains a puzzle. But, as we shall see in chapter six, Eros is manifest at various levels in the soul, and it is only the lover led in the correct way who is able to ascend to the vision of the Beautiful itself; thus the proper use of Eros will be related to this upward journey, just as the misuse of Eros will be to lesser destinations. In the next section, I will discuss the relationship of Eros to the good and bad, and so also the question of the proper use of Eros.

*The Use and Work of Eros as Intermediate: The Moral Consequences of the
Metaphysical Status of Eros's Intermediacy*

Given that Eros is an intermediate, the question arises as to the consequences of this status for the relationship of Eros to virtue. But the meaning of Eros's intermediacy seems consequent upon the interpretation of Eros as designating only a relation or as additionally designating something metaphysical. Since Allen takes the personification of Eros to be an obfuscation of the philosophical analysis of Eros as relation, he understands its intermediacy in a manner that reflects this. He provides the following analysis of intermediates:

Sometimes intermediates are described as having a share of opposite qualities; if Eros were intermediate in this sense, it would be both good and bad, beautiful and ugly, mortal and immortal. In another sense, intermediates instead of possessing both opposites possess neither. In the *Gorgias* (467 ff.; compare *Lysis* 216dff.), for example, intermediates are actions and physical objects that take their value, not from their own

nature, but from their purpose or use; they are neither good nor bad in themselves. The intermediate character of Eros is of this kind. In itself, it is neither good nor bad; it takes its value from its objects. Thirst, for example, the desire to drink, is neither good nor bad in itself; its value is determined by the effect of its gratification in particular circumstances.³¹⁹

For Allen, then, because Eros is merely relational, it is the sort of intermediate that is neutral because of its existence between good and bad. It can be directed toward bad objects, and Allen's argument concludes that it is the choice of object that determines the worth of Eros. An example of Eros directed toward something bad is found in the description of the tyrannical man in the *Republic*, whose Eros is directed toward the wrong kinds of objects; but the love of the wrong objects does not seem adequate to account for the anarchy that characterizes the tyrannical man. He is insatiable in part because he loves the wrong kinds of objects too much, and in part because he is unable to distinguish between the better and worse objects available to him. Eros does not rule and corrupt the tyrant merely because he pursues the wrong objects; the tyrant is ruled by the objects of his desire because he has an improper relationship to them.

Allen's remark above that "actions and physical objects that take their value, not from their own nature, but from their purpose or use" does not seem to resolve this difficulty; indeed, it further complicates his assessment of the intermediate nature of Eros and of desire. If we consider a particular action, like running, it is apparent that the ability to run is a good, though it may be used badly.³²⁰ The ability to run is essential to

³¹⁹ Allen, *Symposium*, 49.

³²⁰ Guthrie makes use of this example in his discussion of intermediates in the *Gorgias*. Like Allen, he indicates here that the situatedness of the action determines whether it is good or bad, but his discussion here does not distinguish the intrinsic goodness of an ability or action from its possible employments. "That Plato himself, like his commentators, did not distinguish a mean between two extremes (black, white, grey)

the survival of a number of animals, including humans, if only for the purpose of fleeing danger. But the final good of such an ability is the well-being of the agent who possesses it. The end of this ability and the end of the agent coincide.

This analysis applies also to desires that are instilled in animals and human beings for the sake of their preservation, namely those bodily desires for things like food, drink, and sex, that preserve both the individual and the species. The desire to drink, simply taken, is a desire for a good necessary to the preservation of the human being.³²¹ One might desire inappropriate beverages (antifreeze) or desire them in inappropriate quantities (vats of wine), and this impropriety of the desired object is revealed in its negative effect on the good of the human being, i.e. on his health in this case. The fact that antifreeze and vast quantities of wine have negative effects on a particular individual does not mean that they are not good in themselves. They have at once an intrinsic goodness and a goodness (or lack of goodness) in relation to different objects; this latter aspect is what Allen terms the use or purpose of the object.

Allen uses the terms ‘use’ and ‘purpose’ interchangeably, but there seems to be an important distinction between the terms. The use of a thing is determined by its proper

from something which in itself is neither because outside their range, appears from *Gorg.* 467e. There are examples of what is between (μεταξύ) good and bad he gives sitting, walking, running, stones and wood, on the grounds that they are sometimes one or the other, sometimes neither. Yet surely the difference is real and important. An intermediate like greyness cannot be either of the extremes; what by itself bears no relation to the extremes can, by the addition of circumstances or motive, become either (running to save a drowning man, running to commit a murder; running leading to health, running leading to a heart attack)” (Guthrie, *History*, 4: 225).

³²¹ “But thirst itself will never be for anything other than what it is in its nature to be for, namely, drink itself, and hunger for food. That’s the way it is, each appetite itself is only for its natural object, while the appetite for something of a certain sort depends on additions” (*Resp.* 4. 437e4-7).

end or *τέλος*; this is specifically indicated in the *Symposium* when Socrates asks Diotima what use (*χρεία*) Eros has for human beings.³²² In the ensuing discussion, the structure of Eros does not change, he is still “of beautiful things” and so still intermediate.³²³ Diotima reformulates Socrates’ original question so that it asks “Why...is Love of beautiful things?”³²⁴ The ultimate answer to Socrates’ original question comes only after the question has been reformulated twice more. The answers to the intermediate questions establish first that “the person who loves, loves beautiful things” in order “to possess them for himself.”³²⁵ The triadic structure of Eros is present in this formulation, but to the understanding of Eros as intermediate between the lover and beloved is added the use (*χρεία*) of Eros. The above answer is, of course, not the final answer, but once Diotima has established that in loving beautiful things the lover loves good things, the ultimate answer to Socrates’ question regarding the use of Eros is finally given: “the person who possesses good things” will “be happy”.³²⁶ This discussion indicates that there is a direct connection between the use (*χρεία*) of Eros and the end or perfection of human being. All human beings have *εὐδαιμονία* as their natural end. This end or perfection is not some purpose that the individual sets for himself, though he has a natural inclination toward it; nor does it differ from one human being to another. Indeed, we find the universality of this end for all human being confirmed in the text immediately following this passage:

³²² *Symp.* 204c6-7.

³²³ *Symp.* 204d1-3.

³²⁴ *Symp.* 204d4.

³²⁵ *Symp.* 204d5-6.

³²⁶ *Symp.* 204d10-e7.

“This wish, then, this love—do you think it common to all human beings, and that everyone wishes always to possess good things, or what’s your view?”

“The same as yours,” I replied; “that it’s common to everyone.”³²⁷

We should, then, understand ‘use’ not as an instrumental means to acquiring some object, but rather as the appropriate directing of an activity proper to an individual being toward its proper end.

We can only speak of Eros being misused or badly directed if there is a proper use of Eros, and the fact that there is a proper use of Eros is supported by its situation within the framework of a teleological cosmos. There is a sense in which Allen’s statement that “its [the desire to drink] value is determined by the effect of its gratification in particular circumstances” is true, but it falls short of the complete truth by neglecting the teleological structure inherent in desire. There are proper objects of desire because certain things are objectively better for certain kinds of beings.

There is evidence for Eros having a proper use not just in the above passage from the exchange between Socrates and Diotima, but also in the speeches of Pausanias and Erixymachus. The discussion of Eros in the *Phaedrus* and the identification of *σκαίός* Eros in that same work further indicate both the potential misuse of Eros and the fact of its having a proper use.³²⁸ Further evidence is seen in Dover’s analysis of Eros as it is treated in a passage from Democritus focusing on the relationship of prostitution to Eros; this analysis distinguishes between what he terms non-legitimate and legitimate Eros.³²⁹

³²⁷ *Symp.* 205a5-8.

³²⁸ *Phdr.* 266a1-b1.

³²⁹ Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 46.

His further analysis suggests a reluctance among Greek authors to apply the term Eros to relationships other than “those homosexual relationships from which what is not *dikaios* is excluded: rape, fraud and intimidation are obviously excluded, and the trend of the whole speech [of Aiskhines] shows that prostitution is also excluded.”³³⁰

The intermediate nature of Eros does not conflict with its having a proper use, but supports it. Simone Weil writes that “no human being should be deprived of his *metaxu*, that is to say of those relative and mixed blessings (home, country, traditions, culture, etc.) which warm and nourish the soul and without which, short of sainthood, a *human* life is not possible.”³³¹ Her understanding of the *μεταξύ* is grounded in her understanding of Greek philosophy, and her insight here is that these *μεταξύ* are the various beloved objects—objects that may be used for good or evil purposes—that populate the daily lives of men. The *μεταξύ* make up the world in which we, as humans, live and love; they “form the region of good and evil”³³² precisely because they are the stuff of love, and serve as the means by which we move toward one pole or the other. Like Eros itself, the *μεταξύ* exist for the sake of the good of human beings; but also like Eros, when misused, the *μεταξύ* corrupt the very beings they were meant to perfect. The *Gorgias* provides an example of such an intermediate in its discussion of rhetoric, with the important

³³⁰ Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 46.

³³¹ Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, with an introduction and postscript by Gustave Thibon, translated by Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr (New York, London: Routledge, 2002), 147.

³³² *Ibid.*, 147.

conclusion that if rhetoric is not ordered to the good of the human being, it does not, in fact, have *any* use.³³³

Χρεία and *ἔργον*

After identifying the *χρεία* of Eros as *εὐδαιμονία*, Diotima turns to the question of the *ἔργον*, or work, of Eros. Her question arises after she has summarized the results of her discussion with Socrates thus far: “we can sum up by saying that love is of permanent possession of what is good.”³³⁴ Diotima’s discussion of the work of Eros follows closely upon her discussion of its use for human beings, and it is evident that, for her, the work of Eros can only properly be understood in relation to its use for human beings, in this case, joining them permanently to what is truly good and beautiful.

Burnyeat’s discussion of the proper use of objects in the *Republic* suggests that the use of objects has an objective determination and that this is further related to the function (*ἔργον*) of the object.

The correct way to design and use a shuttle is determined by its function, to help turn thread into cloth. The correct way to design and use a couch is likewise determined by its function, to help turn the impressionable young into worthy citizens. There are constraints in both cases: you need a sound knowledge of the material you have to work with (the potential and limitations of woolen thread and human nature), and a clear understanding of the end-product you are aiming for (high-quality cloth, high-quality citizens). These constraints make it possible to give an objective account of what a shuttle or couch is and how best to use it. The long discussion of musical poetry in *Republic* II-III can be read as Plato’s account of the objectively best way to use couches and tables for the education and cultural fulfillment of human nature. *Republic* X confirms that “the excellence, the beauty, the rightness of every implement, living

³³³ *Grg.* 480a1-481b3.

³³⁴ *Symp.* 206a11-12.

thing, and action are determined solely by reference to the *use* for which each has been made or grown” (601d). The use of a couch is not just reclining. It is reclining to participate in a culturally intense social gathering.³³⁵

Burnyeat’s discussion is different from our own in that it examines objects produced by human beings, rather than something like Eros, which is one of many naturally occurring phenomena named by them.³³⁶ But this fact about Eros more strongly supports understanding it in terms of Burnyeat’s distinctions; for as much as reason and order are discernible in products made by human beings, even more is reason discernible at work in the order of the cosmos. Burnyeat’s discussion of objects in the *Republic* suggests that both the use and the function of objects are objectively determined, rather than arbitrarily imposed by human beings. Further, the use and function of objects are closely related to one another, and the proper use of an object is subservient to its function. The ἔργον of the axe is to cut, and it is only properly used when it is employed in this work. The ἔργον of the shuttle is to weave cloth, and it is only properly used when it is employed in this activity. In Burnyeat’s examples of the couch and the shuttle, both objects act on the material proper to them in order to transform it; in similar fashion, Eros acts on human nature to transform it. The proper use of each object yields a good product: the properly used shuttle weaves good cloth, the properly used couch forms good citizens, properly

³³⁵ Miles Burnyeat, “Culture and Society in Plato’s *Republic*” in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, ed. Grethe B. Peterson (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1999): 215-324, 246.

³³⁶ One might also consider Eros as a product of human beings insofar as he is a mythical character, but such characters often serve to name and describe actual phenomena.

used Eros yields *εὐδαιμονία*.³³⁷ The *ἔργον* of each object is an activity: shuttles are made for weaving, and couches for cultivating good citizens, axes for cutting. Diotima's question at 206b1 supports this connection between *ἔργον* and activity:

Given then, that love is always this," she replied, "how will those pursuing it do so, and through what activity (praxis), if their intense eagerness in pursuing it is to be called love? What really is this thing that it does (*το ἔργον*)? Can you say?³³⁸

The *ἔργον* of Eros is procreation or participation in immortality,³³⁹ and its proper use is *εὐδαιμονία*. From the connection between the work of Eros and its proper use, we can see that the *ἔργον* is revealed in the activity, and the *χρεία* in the finished product. Since the *χρεία* in this instance, however, is state or disposition, there is a discernible relationship between the use and work of Eros, such that the two may coincide. In chapter six, we will see that this occurs when the rational soul pursues the proper path of love and achieves a share of immortality by contemplating the Beautiful itself. In this instance, the rational soul engages in its highest activity, contemplation, and at once achieves its best disposition, *εὐδαιμονία*.

The discussion of the use (*χρεία*) and function or work (*ἔργον*) of Eros points to the multifaceted nature of Eros. Plato's presentation of Eros through Diotima's discourse has

³³⁷ Just as inferior thread, however, produces inferior cloth, so will the results of Eros or couches on human beings be limited by the individual natures on which they work. In the *Symposium*, this is evident in Diotima's descriptions of the various ways that human beings participate in immortality by means of procreation. Some men will only share in procreation in the way that animals do, by physical procreation; honor lovers may leave behind great deeds or public works that will stand the test of time; only the philosopher attains participation in divine immortality by dwelling with the Forms.

³³⁸ *Symp.* 206b1-4.

³³⁹ *Symp.* 206b1-e5.

moved from identifying the lack of Eros to the intermediate nature of Eros; as intermediate, Eros is presented as the desire of the lover for the beloved object, and so also as the force that moves the lover toward the beloved; as intermediate, Eros unites the lover and the beloved object. But Eros has also a proper use and a proper work, according to the kind of being to which he is joined. Eros, like the cosmos he inhabits, is subject to rational order. Though Eros animates the cosmos and causes all beings to strive toward participation in immortality, he causes this striving in accordance with the proper end of each kind of being. Consequently, his proper use for human beings is to lead them toward states of *εὐδαιμονία*, and his proper work is manifest in the various kinds of procreation that afford them participation in immortality.

Though the discussion of the nature of Eros includes discussion of his use, work, and cause, this does not obliterate the triadic structure of Eros that was discussed earlier. Eros still joins the beloved to the lover, but his intermediacy is understood to include use, work, and cause. This point is important for understanding how Eros is related to issues of psychological motivation, motion, and beloved object. Allen's suggestion above, for instance, that "intermediates are actions and physical objects that take their value, not from their own nature, but from their purpose or use"³⁴⁰ indicates that the purpose or use reveals a psychological motive on the part of the agent or lover, such that the purpose or utility of an action reveals *why* we act and the purpose or utility of an object reveals *why* we pursue it. In brief, such purposes and uses reveal why we find certain actions and objects loveable. It is not difficult to deduce from this analysis that all such intermediates are merely instrumental to the attainment of some good identified by the agent. On this

³⁴⁰ Allen, *Symposium*, 49.

analysis, the purpose we have for acting or pursuing an object is the reason we give for the action we choose, where reason determines the value of the object or action rather than recognizing the intrinsic worth of the action or object. Insofar as reason determines the value of an object, it does so with respect to achieving some end, not with respect to the intrinsic goodness of the object and not with respect to an awareness of its place within a rationally ordered whole. As I have argued above, this assessment of Eros and intermediates is incommensurate with Platonic teleology.

The ramifications of such an assessment of Eros's intermediacy are insidious, for it is precisely the issue of psychological motivation that lies at the heart of the charge of Eros's egocentrism. This assessment results from the failure to distinguish the proper use of Eros that is consequent upon his nature as part of a teleological universe from the purposes proposed by a human agent that direct him toward particular objects and actions. Ends are inscribed in the natures of things, whereas purposes are reasons rational beings provide. Ends determine things like the matter used for the making of an axe and the form that the axe must have; humans use the axe for the purpose of chopping wood.

³⁴¹ "Agents and actors have "purposes" by which they determine themselves to certain actions. Purposes are motives, "motors" propelling us toward destinations."³⁴² It is not,

³⁴¹ Francis Slade, "Ends and Purposes" in *Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy*, v. 30, *Final Causality in Nature and Human Affairs*, ed. Richard F. Hassing (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 1997): 83-85, 83. Cf. Burnyeat, "Culture and Society in Plato's *Republic*", 245-246, esp. n. 63: "One of the differences between Platonic and Aristotelian teleology is that Plato tends to go for the highest purpose a thing can achieve. Eyes are for astronomy, ears for harmonics (530d); both organs are given to us for the improvement of our intellectual understanding (cf. *Timaeus* 46e-48e). At a lower level, the human liver is for divination (*Tim.* 72b)."

³⁴² Francis Slade, "Ends and Purposes", 83.

then, egocentric for a human to move toward *εὐδαιμονία* by virtue of Eros; rather, it is the natural end of a human to be so moved by Eros, it is this very movement that brings him to the completion of his nature. Nor is the human participation in immortality an instance of egocentrism, for this participation is, once again, an instance of humanity fulfilling its natural perfection within the cosmos.

Catherine Osborne identifies the issue of psychological motivation and its relation to the beloved object as central to the interpretation of love generally and Eros specifically as acquisitive, possessive, and egocentric. “It is plain,” she writes, “that most thinkers have taken for granted the idea that love can be analysed and classified on the basis of the needs, desires, or motives that give rise to it.”³⁴³ In this passage, Osborne is considering the structure of Eros in itself and responding to several other accounts of love. Nonetheless, her overarching concern is the recent tendency among scholars to divide love into the categories of acquisitive and egocentric on the one hand, and utterly selfless and giving on the other.³⁴⁴ Since Eros is typically placed in the first of these categories on the grounds that one loves an object for some purpose or other that benefits the lover, she is particularly concerned here to discuss psychological motivation. While she identifies an important problem in recent literature on love and Eros, her failure to distinguish clearly among terms such as need, desire, and motive obfuscates her analysis. For example, she criticizes Aristotle’s account of friendship as an instance of the philosophical tendency to assess love according to “the motives (for pleasure, for profit,

³⁴³ Osborne, *Eros Unveiled*, 9.

³⁴⁴ She includes not only Nygren and Vlastos, but also C. S. Lewis’s *Four Loves* and Vincent Brümmer’s *The Model of Love*.

or for the good)'' for friendship.³⁴⁵ That pleasure, profit, and the good are psychological motives is not, strictly speaking, true for Aristotle. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, for instance, he writes: ''The kinds of friendship may perhaps be cleared up if we first come to know the object of love. For not everything seems to be loved but only the lovable, and this is good, pleasant, or useful....''³⁴⁶ The ensuing discussion in chapter three demonstrates that the object of love remains the good, pleasant, or useful with respect to the lover himself. At best we might say that Aristotle's analysis indicates a psychological motive in the lover with respect to the beloved object; but Aristotle's analysis is not of the subject and his motives, rather it is a sketch or outline of relationships among friends. This, in itself, sets Aristotle's account apart, since his subject is *φιλία* rather than Eros. But, more importantly, it highlights the flaw in Osborne's analysis. She moves from a critique of analyses of love that depend on need, desire, or motive as tools for categorization to a critique of the Aristotelian account of friendship that depends upon the beloved object for categorization. While the Aristotelian account may indicate the existence of a psychological motive in the lover or friend, it maintains the distinction between psychological motive and beloved object that Osborne's treatment obscures.

Osborne's treatment neglects to distinguish among needs, desires, and motives, and furthermore, to distinguish the various senses of motive. Needs, for our purposes, are deficiencies in the subject that must necessarily be filled to ensure the well-being of the subject. Such things might include food, drink, housing, and companionship. That these things are needs does not exclude them from also being desires. Often, the subject

³⁴⁵ Osborne, 9, n. 17.

³⁴⁶ Aristotle *Eth. Nic.* 8.2. 1155b16-20.

desires those things necessary for her own survival and well-being. In this sense, needs and desires may overlap or coincide. Desires are distinct from needs in two ways, however. First, it is possible to desire things that are contrary to the needs of the subject, as when someone with dropsy strongly desires drink when what he most needs is to abstain from it. Second, it is possible to desire things that are not, strictly speaking, necessary for the survival and well-being of the subject. This occurs, for instance, when someone desires not drink simply to satisfy thirst, not merely adequate quantities of water, but a fine single malt scotch. In these senses, needs and desires are distinct from one another, and the scope of desire is broader than the scope of need. In neither case, however, is it necessary to appeal to motive in a psychological sense in order to consider their natures.

‘Motive’ is itself an obscure and imprecise term with many possible significations. First, in its contemporary usage, it often signifies psychological motivation for action; but such motivations might be further distinguished as (a) reasons for acting identified by the agent, or purposes; (b) needs (thus deficiencies), such as hunger or thirst, that are nonrational catalysts for action; (c) desires as distinct from needs but inclusive of emotions such as anger; (d) any of the above-mentioned of which the agent is not aware. Second, the term motive might designate a moving force, an origin or source of motion. Third, as in Osborne’s assessment, a beloved object might be designated a motive.

Osborne argues against the position “that the status of the beloved determines the kind of love or the motives for it” focusing on three examples of love generally deemed

not respectable.³⁴⁷ The first of these she calls “love in bad taste” and describes as occurring when “the lover finds beauty in an object which educated or fashionable taste scorns.”³⁴⁸ The second, “excessive love”, “is love that goes over the top for something that does not merit such devotion.”³⁴⁹ The third is “love that is motivated”, and its lack of respectability lies in the fact that the lover loves his object not for itself, but for “motives of personal gain”.³⁵⁰ These considerations lead her to the following conclusion:

Saying that love is unseemly if it is motivated by some further hope of gain implies that there is always some motive for love. This is precisely what I shall argue is a mistake. On the contrary we need to recognize that love *is* a motive, if you like, among other motives; where some other motive explains my action, the action is not motivated by love. If love is the motive, no further motive need be sought. So it makes nonsense to look for a motive for love, though it may make sense to ask for motives for action. If we see love as an attitude, rather than a response provoked by some object of desire or concern, we shall be less likely to seek a ‘motive’ for the response.³⁵¹

Osborne’s position, as she states it here, intends to further clarify her claim that most treatments of love depend on “needs, desires, or motives” on the part of the lover “that give rise to it [love]”. But in this formulation of the problem, she is claiming that the beloved object is the source of these categorizations. The consequence of this statement is that both the lover and the beloved are sources of the needs, desires, and motives that cause the love relation. Can it really be the case, especially for thinkers such as Plato and

³⁴⁷ Osborne, 15.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 16.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 16.

³⁵¹ Ibid., 17.

Aristotle, that both lover and beloved are sources of “needs, desires, or motives” with respect to the same love relation, in the same way, and at the same time?

As soon as we identify an object or person as beloved, we identify it as loveable. Any classical analysis of such a statement would recognize the beloved as good, beautiful, and therefore loveable, by virtue of its being at all. This is a central truth for Plato—all that has being is also good, because being itself is good. It is because of the intrinsic goodness of an object or person (however slight that goodness might be) that love in the lover arises. This structure is fundamentally different from an account of love that begins by examining the subjective psychological motivations of the lover because the beloved object is not merely a good *for him*, but exists as objectively good insofar as the beloved exists at all. To explain love in terms of psychological motives is to determine the beloved’s value according to the purposes set by the lover that the beloved might serve, rather than to recognize that the beloved shares in goodness insofar as he shares in being. It is not, then, the beloved himself that is objectionable, but the purpose for which the lover loves him. This is precisely Plato’s point in his caricature of such “reasonable” but utilitarian Eros in the *Phaedrus*.³⁵² Eros in its true form never permits us to use others so badly; in fact, Eros is divine precisely because it comes from outside of us, as daimonic possession, and gives us the ability to see the beloved as intrinsically good. Daimonic possession leads the soul to love appropriately because it gives the soul the vision of goodness and beauty as they exist objectively, and not merely as they exist for the individual, as part of the grandeur of the cosmos.

³⁵² *Phdr.* 237a9-241d1.

In the *Symposium*, Pausanius suggests such a distinction in distinguishing the beloved himself (always desired under the auspices of beauty of some sort) and the manner in which one loves, which is tied to what the lover hopes to get from or give to the beloved. If we recall Diotima's discussion of the use and work of Eros, we find another such distinction. The object of Eros does not change—it is always of the beautiful and good. The use of Eros for human beings is the attainment of *εὐδαιμονία*, the beautiful and good state of the human being. The works of Eros are found in the various activities of lovers by which they participate in immortality. If we return to a consideration of the triadic structure of Eros, we find that Eros still joins the lover to the beloved object. The use of Eros and the work of Eros belong to him as intermediate; they are the means by which he brings humans to *εὐδαιμονία* and participation in immortality. Eros does have a motive in the psychological sense, and this is what Plato designates the use of Eros for human beings, but it is part of the nature of Eros itself and of human beings themselves.

We have seen that Eros's intermediate status affords him real existence, and that this real existence involves the motion not only of the cosmos, but also of the individual souls. The theme and structure of daimonic possession is suggested by Eros's description as intermediate, and yet the gods do not bless those possessed of hubris, but those who cultivate poverty. Analogically, this means the daimon or tutelary spirit comes to be in or takes possession of the human being only if the proper disposition, i.e., poverty, is cultivated and present in the agent. The sense in which the Eros-daimon leads the lover toward the vision of Beauty is discussed further in chapter six, and the further relation

between divine possession, katharsis, and the practice of poverty are discussed in chapter seven.

CHAPTER SIX

POVERTY IN THE ASCENT TO THE VISION OF BEAUTY

In previous chapters, I have argued that the parentage of Eros³⁵³ is central to understanding his nature, that this nature is epitomized in the myth of his parentage that describes him as at once poor and resourceful, and that the kind of poverty distinctive of Eros is *πενία* because it makes possible *φιλοσοφία ἄφθονος*. It remains, however, to investigate the consequences of this understanding of Eros's nature, as Diotima herself does in the last major section of her discourse, that which addresses the question of the cause (*αἰτία*) of Eros.

This chapter will examine the presence and role of the Poros-Penia image in this last section of Diotima's discourse.³⁵⁴ From the beginning of the section discussing immortality and procreation, Diotima's language no longer refers to the Poros-Penia image of Eros and does not make explicit use of the imagery of lack or need. Yet, there is in her initial description of Eros as the child of Poros and Penia a depiction of the continual motion that belongs to him as their child: "His nature is neither that of an immortal, nor that of a mortal, but on the same day, now he flourishes and lives, when he finds resources, and now he dies, but then comes back to life again."³⁵⁵ This image of

³⁵³ Throughout the Socrates-Diotima passage, Eros is used both to refer to love as a divinity and to love as a relation. This results in some ambiguity for the reader, as there appears always to be a metaphysical and psychological meaning to the text. I have chosen to capitalize Eros throughout in order to preserve this double meaning.

³⁵⁴ *Symp.* 207a4-212a7.

³⁵⁵ *Symp.* 203d7- e3.

perpetual motion reappears in the discussions of immortality and procreation in this last section of Diotima's discourse; not only is this motion present in the discussion of immortality and procreation, it is present also in the ascent passage,³⁵⁶ as the lover moves upward toward the final vision of the beautiful. Poverty, as it appears in the discussions of immortality, procreation, and ascent, is revealed as dispositional, in relation to a resourcefulness and productivity, and is embedded in the descriptions of Eros that occur at each level of soul; in the ascent passage itself it appears in the 'relaxing',³⁵⁷ of the soul's passion toward objects it has found *σμικρός* in relation to other objects; it is captured in the description of the penultimate stage of the ascent, which presents the lover as procreating in *φιλοσοφία ἄφθονος*, and is the precondition for the vision of beauty itself. There are, however, also some structural elements of the dialogue to which I would like to draw attention as providing a framework for understanding the overall import and implications of the ascent passage. Therefore, I will begin with a brief discussion of these elements, the way they draw the reader's attention to the question of the *αἰτία* of Eros, and suggest a division of the discussion between 207a5 and 212 d1 that is parallel to the tripartite division of the soul described in the *Republic*. The question of the *αἰτία* of Eros frames the discussion of immortality and procreation within which the ascent passage is situated as the way to the best form of participation in immortality.

³⁵⁶ *Symp.* 209e5-212a7.

³⁵⁷ *χαλάω* at 210b5, *ἐπανίημι* at 211b6, c1.

The Structure of Socrates' Discourse

The structure of Socrates' discourse is indicated by Socrates himself, when he twice refers to the oratorical method earlier espoused by Agathon.³⁵⁸ At the beginning of his own encomium, Agathon finds fault with all of the preceding speakers for “congratulating humans on the goods the god is responsible (*αἴτιος*) for giving them” rather than “eulogizing the god” and saying what kind of character Eros must have on the basis of the goods he provides to humans.³⁵⁹ The correct way (*τρόπος ὁρθός*) to give praise, Agathon argues, is “to describe in speech what sort of character whoever is the subject of the speech has in virtue of which he is actually responsible (*αἴτιος*) for what. Thus it is right and proper for us too to praise Love himself first for what he is (*οἷός ἐστιν*), then for his gifts (*τὰς δόσεις*).”³⁶⁰

Socrates' first reference to this method is at the beginning of his examination of Agathon: “Well now, my dear Agathon: you seemed to me to make a good start to your speech, when you said that one should first of all display the sort of character Love himself has, and then go on to what he does.”³⁶¹ This remark leads into his questioning Agathon regarding a specific *οἷός ἐστιν* of Eros that he had *not* mentioned, whether “Love

³⁵⁸ *Symp.* 199c5-8, 201d7-e1.

³⁵⁹ *Symp.* 194e5-195a1: *δουκοῦσι γάρ μοι πάντες οἱ πρόσθεν εἰρηκότες οὐ τὸν θεὸν ἐγκωμιάζειν ἀλλὰ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους εὐδαιμονίζειν τῶν αγαθῶν ὧν ὁ θεός αὐτοῖς αἴτιος· ὁποῖος δέ τις αὐτὸς ὧν ταῦτα ἐδωπήσατο, οὐδεὶς εἶπηκεν.*

³⁶⁰ *Symp.* 195a1-5.

³⁶¹ *Symp.* 199c5-8: *Καὶ μὲν, ὦ φίλε Ἀγάθων, καλῶς μοι ἔδοξας κατηγγήσασθαι τοῦ λόγου, λέγων ὅτι πρῶτον μὲν δεῖ αὐτὸν ἐπιδειῖξαι ὁποῖός τις ἐστὶν ὁ Ἔρως, ὕστερον δὲ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ.*

[is] of the sort to make him love of something, or of nothing.”³⁶² This elenchus of Agathon begins the section of Socrates’ account that will address the nature of Eros. Socrates’ speech regarding the nature of Eros is centered on this particular *οἷός ἐστι*, which serves as the theme for his further variations. It is notable, however, that Socrates has slightly reformulated Agathon’s statement of method. Where Agathon speaks of “*οἷός ἐστιν*”, Socrates speaks of “*ὁποῖός τις ἐστιν*”; where Agathon speaks of “*τάς δόσεις*”, Socrates speaks of “*τὰ ἔργα*”. While Agathon incorporates “*αἴτιος*” as a way of speaking of the things Eros causes in virtue of his character, Socrates makes no mention here of *αἴτιος* or its cognate *αἰτία*.

Socrates’ second reference to Agathon’s method occurs just before he begins recounting what he learned from Diotima. Here, Socrates says, “Now one should do, Agathon, as you did, first describing who Love himself is and what sort of character he has, and then going on to what he does.”³⁶³ His formulation here differs slightly from the first; instead of “*ὁποῖός τις ἐστιν*” Socrates uses “*τίς ἐστιν ὁ Ἔρως καὶ τοῖός τις*”, and so moves from speaking generally of what sort of thing Eros is to speaking about *who* he is, and with the interrogative “*ποῖός*” of *what sort* he is.

Two particular aspects of Plato’s language here seem to bear upon the understanding of the ascent passage and its place in the discourse as a whole. The first is Socrates’ use of *τὰ ἔργα* in place of Agathon’s *τάς δόσεις*; the second is Agathon’s use of *αἴτιος* in relation to the nature of Eros, language that is echoed in Diotima’s discourse

³⁶² *Symp.* 199d1-3.

³⁶³ *Symp.* 201d7-e1: *δεῖ δὲ, ὦ Ἀγάθων, ὥσπερ σὺ διηγῆσω διελθεῖν αὐτὸν πρῶτον, τίς ἐστιν ὁ Ἔρως καὶ ποῖός τις, ἔπειτα τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ.*

when she takes up the question of the *αἰτία* of Eros. The first of these, the substitution of *τὰ ἔργα* for *τὰς δόσεις*, occurs in both of Socrates' statements of method, and so seems rather more than accidental. What then, might be the purpose of such a substitution? *τὰ ἔργα* is the substantive derived from the verb *ἔργω*, to work, while *τὰς δόσεις* is the substantive derived from the verb *δίδωμι*, to give. *τὰ ἔργα*,³⁶⁴ as “the workings” or “the works or deeds” of Eros, then, has a more active connotation than its counterpart in Agathon's formula, so that Socrates' formulation leads the reader to think of what Eros does or effects rather than what he dispenses to humans in the manner of “gifts”. This prefigures the active role that the Eros-daimon will have in binding together the realms of the divine and the human.³⁶⁵ Furthermore, thematic in the dialogue as a whole is the idea that Eros in some way makes humans better,³⁶⁶ and these two different formulations of the interaction between Eros and humanity bring to focus a distinction between two ways of conceiving of Eros: as one whose gifts are passively received or as one whose deeds and works may be shared or participated in by humans. It is only the latter of these two conceptions that fully captures the sense of the daimonic in Greek life.³⁶⁷

The second significant aspect of Plato's language appears in Agathon's formulation of method. Agathon suggests that the things caused by Eros are in some way

³⁶⁴ Procreation enters the discussion as the work of Eros.

³⁶⁵ *Symp.* 202d14-203a7.

³⁶⁶ This is evident in the speeches of Phaedrus (especially at 180b7-9), Pausanias (184b6-c3, 185a1-c3), Erixymachus (187d5-e1, 188c4-e1), Aristophanes (189d1-3, 193d1-6) and Agathon (195e5-9, 197c2-e5).

³⁶⁷ For an account of the daemonic in Greek life, see E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957).

indicative of his character; indeed Agathon states that it is “in virtue of which [this character] he is actually responsible (*αἴτιος*) for what.”³⁶⁸ This allusion to the significant issue of *αἴτια* and its relation to giving an account of the nature of things is taken up again in Diotima’s formulation of the cause (*αἴτια*) of Eros that begins the discussion of immortality and leads eventually to the ascent passage.

Oddly, after the second time he recommends the aforementioned method, Socrates proceeds in the very next sentence to declare his intention of abandoning it, since “it seems...easiest to go about describing him [Eros] in the way the Mantinean visitor once went about it, by closely questioning me.”³⁶⁹ Given this, it is difficult to determine whether Socrates seriously intends to abide by the oratorical method he has endorsed. Yet, an examination of the discourse of Diotima as a whole reveals that, even though the form of the discourse is largely dialogue, it may be divided into sections according to the questions that are raised within it, and these sections do follow the oratorical method espoused by Socrates, investigating first the character of Eros and then his works.

It is clear that the first part of the dialogue between Socrates and Diotima (201d1-204c6) sets out to clarify the character or nature of Eros, or in Socrates’ words “*τίς ἐστίν ὁ Ἔρως καὶ ποῖός τις*”—who he is and of what sort he is.³⁷⁰ Thus, this early part of their

³⁶⁸ *Symp.* 195a2-3.

³⁶⁹ *Symp.* 201e1-3.

³⁷⁰ The “*ποῖός τις*”, translated by Rowe as “what sort of character he has”, is broad enough to indicate character in the sense that it would apply to any god, demi-god, or human and so indicate virtue or vice, but might also look ahead to the description of Eros as intermediate and as daimon.

exchange establishes that Eros, because lack, and thus imperfection, are part of his nature, cannot be a god. Further discussion of his nature as intermediate between the human and divine leads to the conclusion that he is a daimon. This nature is further explained by the theogonic account of Eros, and the qualities of both his parents are used to explain the particular kind of intermediate nature he possesses.³⁷¹ Thus, at the end of this section of the dialogue, the reader has already in his mind that Eros is a daimon, intermediate, always accompanied by a kind of lack or need, but never wholly without resource (*ἄπορος*). The next section of the dialogue proceeds to examine the use (*χρεία*)³⁷² of Eros to humans, and the answer to this question lies in the fact that it is by virtue of Eros that humans aim at happiness; this recognition of the universal nature of Eros as a desire for happiness leads to the further conclusion that all humans have in common this desire for happiness and so are lovers, regardless of the fact that the common usage of the term Eros has a much narrower designation. This section of the dialogue ends by answering the questions of whom and of what sort Eros is with the following formulation: “Love is of permanent possession of what is good”.³⁷³

³⁷¹ *Symp.* 203a8-204c6.

³⁷² R. G. Bury writes: “τίνα χρείαν κτλ. Here begins the second section of Socrates-Diotima’s exposition. For *χρεία*, “utility,”—equiv. here to the *δόσεις* of 195A, the *ἔργα* of 199C—cp. *Gorg.* 480 A, etc.” *The Symposium of Plato*, edited with introduction, critical notes and commentary by R. G. Bury (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, 1909), 105. His remark indicates that the second major section of the Socrates-Diotima exchange properly begins at 203a with the discussion of what use Eros is to human beings. R. E. Allen identifies the passage discussing the works of Eros as beginning at 206b, with Diotima asking for a description of the work of Eros. *Symposium*, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, vol 2, translated with comment by R. E. Allen (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 71. Neither of these positions, however, seems to account for the presence of *ἀτία* later on, or its relationship to *ἔργα* and *χρεία*.

³⁷³ *Symp.* 206a11-12.

The next major section of the dialogue is clearly marked by Diotima's transitional question to Socrates: "Given, then, that love is always this," she replied, "how will those pursuing it do so, and through what activity, if their intense eagerness in pursuing it is to be called love? What really is this thing that it does (τό ἔργον)?"³⁷⁴ Diotima explains that its activity or work—that by which it is pursued—is procreation, and that this takes place "in relation both to body and to soul."³⁷⁵ Diotima's further explanation of this statement reveals that "all human beings...are pregnant both in body and in soul, and when we come to be of the right age, we naturally desire to give birth."³⁷⁶ It is this giving birth and participation in procreation that gives mortal creatures a share in the divine.³⁷⁷ The work of Eros, then, seems to be this "procreation (γένεσις) and giving birth (τόκος) in the beautiful."³⁷⁸ Furthermore, procreation is the means by which humans participate in immortality,³⁷⁹ and these two—procreation and immortality—are added to the preceding formulation of Eros as "permanent possession of what is good" in the formulation at 206e5: "Love is of procreation and giving birth in the beautiful." This is the final

³⁷⁴ *Symp.* 206b1-3.

³⁷⁵ *Symp.* 206b5-6.

³⁷⁶ *Symp.* 206c1-4.

³⁷⁷ *Symp.* 206c6-7.

³⁷⁸ *Symp.* 206e5.

³⁷⁹ Diotima can make such an assertion because, as she explains, "procreation is something everlasting and immortal, as far as anything can be for what is mortal; and it is immortality, together with the good, that must necessarily be desired, according to what has been agreed before—if indeed love is of permanent possession of the good. Well, from this argument it necessarily follows that love is of immortality as well" (206e7-207a3).

reformulation of the nature of Eros, and the one the reader is left to take with her to the next part of Diotima's discussion, which is pursued under the auspices of seeking the cause (*αἰτία*) of Eros.

The fact that Diotima inquires after the *ἔργον* of Eros at 206b3 indicates a new stage of the discussion; it fulfills Socrates' stated intention to speak first of the nature of Eros and then of his works. Further evidence of this is provided by Diotima at 204d, when she summarizes the discussion that has gone before: "Love's character, and his birth, are as I have said; and he is of beautiful things, according to what you say." It is evident, then, that Socrates' intention to speak first of the nature of Eros, and then of his works is reflected in the structure and language of the dialogue itself. In the course of Diotima's speech, she moves from speaking of the parentage of Eros to his use (*χρεία*) for humans to his activity or *ἔργον*, and finally to his *αἰτία*. Two of these terms, use (*χρεία*) and cause (*αἰτία*), stand out because they were not forecast by Socrates' statement regarding method.³⁸⁰ In neither of the two reformulations of Agathon's method for encomia does Socrates mention *αἰτία*, though Agathon himself had used the cognate *αἴτιος* to indicate *what* Eros causes as a result of his character.³⁸¹ It is somewhat surprising,

³⁸⁰ It might be argued that both terms could be included in *τὰ ἔργα*, but the distinct terms themselves positioned within the questions that shift the direction of the dialogue suggest distinct meanings. The movement from *χρεία* to *ἔργα* to *αἰτία*, along with Diotima's explanation of each term suggests that *χρεία* indicates the final and external cause of Eros, that *ἔργα* indicates its characteristic activity, or the end as activity (such an end is happiness), and that *αἰτία* indicates both beginning and end, i.e. the Form from which a thing proceeds, the perfection toward which it strives, and the principle from which it moves toward perfection. The progression of the dialogue suggests that *χρεία*, as happiness, is the "product" of Eros, and that this product is achieved by engaging in the *ἔργα*, or characteristic activity of Eros. Both *χρεία* and *ἔργα* are thus governed by *αἰτία*, as the origin and end of Eros.

³⁸¹ *Symp.* 195a1-5.

then, to find the question of *αἰτία* as the catalyst for a major turning point in the dialogue; for without its mention, Diotima might not have the occasion to explain the relationship of immortality and procreation to Eros. It is further significant that the question of Eros's *αἰτία* is the setting of the Lesser and Greater Mysteries of Eros. In what sense, then, is *αἰτία* meant in this passage and what role does it play in the understanding of the ascent and final revelation of Eros?

The *Symposium* does not offer a discussion of *αἰτία*, though Diotima's placement of the subject of Eros's *αἰτία* suggests that it falls within the domain of the works of Eros. There is, further, Agathon's usage of *αἴτιος*, which is suggestive of a relationship between what sort of thing something is and what it causes (or that for which it is responsible). In this sense, *αἰτία* indicates something flowing from the nature of the thing. Such an understanding of *αἰτία* is consonant with Socrates' discussion of *αἰτία* in the *Phaedo*,³⁸²

³⁸² Socrates argues in the *Phaedo* against those who misunderstand the true nature of *αἰτία*, especially those who posit material elements, such as air and water, as causes. These people, he says at 98c1-3, do not "assign any real causes for the ordering of things." Rather, as he says at 99b3-5, "whoever talks in that way is unable to make a distinction and to see that in reality a cause is one thing, and the thing without which the cause could never be a cause is quite another thing. And so it seems to me that most people, when they give the name of cause to the latter, are groping in the dark, as it were, and are giving it a name that does not belong to it." In this passage, speaking of bones and sinews as the mistaken causes of his presently being seated in a prison cell, Socrates distinguishes his rational choice as cause from the material causes of his being. This seems to be the sort of cause he has in mind at the beginning of his discussion of *αἰτία* at *Phaedo* 97c2-6, where he says of Anaxagoras's theory, "I was pleased with this theory of cause, and it seemed to me to be somehow right that the mind should be the cause of all things, and I thought, 'If this is so, the mind in arranging things arranges everything and establishes each thing as it is best for it to be. So if anyone wishes to find the cause of the generation or destruction or existence of a particular thing, he must find out what sort of existence, or passive state of any kind, or activity is best for it.'" This is, of course, just the sort of thing that the Form is, and Socrates' subsequent discussion in the *Phaedo* makes it clear that these realities are the true objects of knowledge. See also the

which suggests that approaching an understanding of things according to their *αἰτία* is to understand that the only cause of a thing's being is its participation in the Forms.³⁸³ *Αἰτία* in this sense is not to be understood linearly, as an articulation of beginnings and the consequences that follow from them;³⁸⁴ rather the *αἰτία* are the Forms or perfections toward which sensible being strives. Thus, in asking for the *αἰτία* of Eros, Diotima is asking for the perfect instance of it, and this prepares the way for her discussion of the various ways of participating in Eros, all articulated as images of desire for immortality.³⁸⁵

The ascent passage proper begins at 209e5, situated after Diotima's question regarding the *αἰτία* of Eros and after her initial discussion of immortality and procreation that serves as answer to that question. The entire discussion of the *αἰτία* of Eros, then, can be divided very broadly according to her discussion of immortality and procreation between 207a5 and 209e4, and the Greater Mysteries of Eros that belong to the ascent passage.³⁸⁶ Both sections are united, however, by the themes of immortality and

discussion of the *Phaedo* in Hans Georg Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

³⁸³ *Phaedo* 101c-e.

³⁸⁴ *Phd.* 101c-e.

³⁸⁵ A further consequence of this is that the motion of the cosmos is accounted for by Eros.

³⁸⁶ It is perhaps also noteworthy that all of the allusions and corrections to prior speeches are found within the first two of these divisions, so that once Diotima embarks on the telling of the final revelation, the text moves definitively beyond the preceding depictions of Eros.

procreation that serve as their subject.³⁸⁷ These sections should be understood, then, as one prolonged discourse on the themes of immortality and procreation insofar as these are the *αἰτίαι* of Eros. Viewed from this perspective, a tripartite structure of the text from 207a5 to the end of the ascent passage emerges, along the lines of the tripartite division of the soul articulated in the *Republic*.³⁸⁸ The different descriptions of the lover's activity and procreation are descriptions of the kind of procreation proper to each part of the tripartite soul. Just as, in the *Republic*, each part of the soul has its proper pleasure,³⁸⁹ so in the *Symposium*, each part of the soul has a proper activity in the pursuit of its proper pleasure.

This structure is further suggested by the introduction, early on, of a distinction between kinds of immortality, according to the manner in which mortal and immortal beings participate in immortality. The mortal immortality of which Diotima speaks is the perpetuation of the name or image of an individual that occurs in time; such is the immortality insured to all beings that generate offspring.³⁹⁰ The immortality proper to divine beings, however, is of a different nature, because the divine, being perfect, is

³⁸⁷ Into these lower stages, Diotima has woven allusions to the preceding encomia, correcting in places what was said by others earlier. The implication of the allusions to these other accounts of love in this place in her speech is that the other speakers have succeeded only in articulating the lower forms of Eros, and have even done that in an insufficient manner since they have mistaken a part of Eros for the whole of it.

³⁸⁸ This is distinct from the lower stages of the ascent described in the ascent passage itself, since even at the lowest stage the lover here begets *only λόγοι*.

³⁸⁹ *Resp.* 9. 580d5-581d2.

³⁹⁰ *Symp.* 208a6-b9. See also Michael J. O'Brien, " 'Becoming Immortal in Plato's *Symposium*' " in *Greek Poetry and Philosophy: Studies in Honour of Leonard Woodbury*, edited by Douglas E. Gerber (Scholars Press: Chico, California, 1984) 184-203.

removed from time and change. Existing as it does beyond the realm of temporality and flux, the divine is truly immortal, “by always being the same in every way.”³⁹¹ It is worth considering why this distinction is introduced at all, much less at this particular place, since Diotima never takes up the issue of the immortality proper to gods or of the gods themselves in what follows. It seems, then, that the distinction between kinds of immortality only makes sense if there is a divine part³⁹² in humans that can enjoy immortality in the manner of the divine, in addition to the ability to participate in immortality that belongs to humans as mortal beings.

Given this understanding of *αἰτία*, then, the passage regarding immortality should be understood in terms of the relation of the realm of becoming to immortality itself; indeed, what serves as answer to Diotima’s question is a description of participation in immortality from the lowest grade of sensible being to the highest grade of being in humans, the rational element. The discussion of procreation that is woven into the discussion of immortality is structured not only by the distinction between procreation of body and soul, but more fundamentally according to the distinction Diotima draws between mortal and divine immortality. Nested within this distinction between mortal and divine immortality is a description of the manner in which the three different faculties of soul participate in immortality, each according to its proper object of desire. The desire to be immortal seems to be the soul’s desire to dwell with the Forms, to

³⁹¹ *Symp.* 208b1.

³⁹² This part of the human soul, however, does not seem to be made explicit in the *Symposium*, if it is to be identified with *νοῦς*. What is present in the *Symposium* is the claim at 206c6-7 that “living creatures, despite their mortality, contain this immortal aspect, of pregnancy and procreation.”

become more like that which, in its essence, it is itself; this is what moves it toward knowledge.

Eros, the Tripartite Soul, and Participation in Immortality

The passage from *Symposium* 207a5-212b1 depicts the different sorts of procreation and so also immortality at work in the cosmos. Diotima gives an account that begins with the most general and universal instances of procreation and ascends to the more specific and limited instances of procreation that are singular to human beings, beginning with the physical aspects of human beings, proceeding to the affective³⁹³ aspects of human beings, and finally to the rational aspect of human beings. Out of this description arises an account of the manner in which the human soul participates in immortality insofar as its Eros is directed toward the objects proper to each of its parts, beginning with the appetitive, proceeding to the affective, and finally to the rational.³⁹⁴ The first instance of this occurs immediately after Diotima asks about the cause of Eros, when she describes the physical procreation common to all animals, and also to the appetitive element of the human soul:

What do you think, Socrates, is the cause of this love, and this desire? Don't you see how terribly all animals are affected whenever they feel the desire to procreate, whether they go on foot or have wings—all of them stricken with the effects of love, first for intercourse with one another, and then also for nurturing their offspring, so that the weakest are prepared to

³⁹³ I have used the term 'affective' rather than 'spirited' here because the description at 207e2-5 indicates that what Diotima has in mind is broader than what is ascribed to the spirited element, but distinguished from what is properly rational. Her remark here notes the changeability of things that belong to the soul, including "traits, habits, opinions, desires, pleasures, pains, fears."

³⁹⁴ *Resp.* 4. 436a6-441c1, 9. 580d7-587a1.

join battle with the strongest on their offspring's behalf and even die for them, torturing themselves with hunger so as to rear them, and doing everything else necessary?³⁹⁵

Diotima's first description of the cause of love and desire, then, is articulated as an instance of appetitive nature. This passage suggests that Eros is a motive force in all living beings, driving them toward procreation, and disposing them to suffer for the sake of their offspring. In the animal world, this investment in the well-being of offspring is particularly puzzling, since this investment does not appear to be grounded in rationality. As Diotima continues, this appetitive drive is more clearly linked to the desire for immortality, but once again, at this primordial level, the desire for immortality is not one grounded in the rationality of the beings who exhibit it.

Diotima's description of procreation as the mortal participation in immortality occurs in the following passage:

The same account applies to animals as to human beings: mortal nature seeks so far as it can to exist for ever and to be immortal. And it can achieve it only in this way, through the process of coming-into-being, because it always leaves behind something else that is new in place of the old, since even during the time in which each living creature is said to be alive and to be the same individual—as for example someone is said to be the same person from when he is a child until he comes to be an old man, and yet, if he's called the same, that's despite the fact that he's never made up from the same thing, but is always being renewed, and losing what he had before, whether its hair, or flesh, or bones, or blood, in fact the whole body.³⁹⁶

Her first descriptions of procreation as participating in immortality, then, show that this procreation exists at all levels of mortal being; even the component parts of the human being are seen to be in a state of fluctuation, coming into being and passing away to be

³⁹⁵ *Symp.* 207a5-b6.

³⁹⁶ *Symp.* 207c9-e2.

replaced again. At its most general and universal level, Eros is the natural motion of the cosmos. In this brief description, Diotima provides a graded presentation of the activities of Eros in the cosmos—the everlasting coming-to-be and passing away of things occurs at a microcosmic level in the human being, as it does also in the physical preservation of any individual organism; at the macrocosmic level of physical procreation, animals and humans leave behind images of themselves in their offspring. The desire for immortality is explained in terms of reproduction, and the changes of both the body and the soul that take place within an individual while he appears to remain the same are used as examples of the kinds of reproduction that allow mortal beings to pursue a more divine life. Thus, in two ways, humans are seen to participate in immortality by procreation. The desire for physical procreation that Diotima cites at the beginning of this section is the desire proper to the appetitive element.³⁹⁷ The irrational or appetitive element of the soul is responsible not only for animating the internal procreation necessary for growth and nutrition of the body, but also for the impulse that extends beyond the body-soul composite in procreating new physical beings.

The procreation that is proper to the soul belongs, in one sense, to the honor-loving part of the soul, or spirited element.³⁹⁸ The lover of honor procreates for the sake of immortal fame.³⁹⁹ Diotima gives two examples of this kind of lover. There are those, like Alcestis and Achilles, who sacrificed themselves for their loves so that their names

³⁹⁷ Cf. *Resp.* 439d-e.

³⁹⁸ *Symp.* 209a-c.

³⁹⁹ At 208c-d humans are “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.”

would be remembered for their magnificent deeds.⁴⁰⁰ The second set of honor lovers she describes, however, are those who leave behind magnificent works, as do poets and craftsmen.⁴⁰¹ This honor-lover is described in greater detail, and in relation to his beloved. Upon finding someone beautiful in both body and soul, the lover “*εὐπορεῖ λόγων*”; he is full of things to say about what will make his beloved good.⁴⁰² It is notable that the lover is not said to procreate *λόγοι* in this instance, and this distinguishes the lover at this level from the lover at the first stage of the ascent passage. Rather, this lover produces beautiful works, the immortal children of the soul—in poetry, laws, virtue; the lover is inspired by the beauty he perceives in the beloved, and gazing upon this beauty, generates works in praise of it. The comments here regarding the poets and craftsmen as being pregnant with *φρόνησις* and the other virtues seem to have at least a two-fold significance. On the one hand, it is unlikely that Plato or his Socrates would endorse the position that poets and craftsmen would have the truth regarding virtue;⁴⁰³ and, taking

⁴⁰⁰ *Symp.* 208d2-6.

⁴⁰¹ *Symp.* 209a3-5.

⁴⁰² *Symp.* 209b7-c2.

⁴⁰³ “Wisdom and the rest of virtue; of which all the poets are, of course, procreators’: presumably an ironic compliment to Agathon, and Aristophanes, both of whom might like to think of themselves as having some sort of wisdom (here *phronêsis*, as at 202a9, 203d6), of the sort generally attributed to Homer and Hesiod (cf. d3-4n.), but neither of whom has actually managed to show much evidence of wisdom. Whatever we suppose to be P.’s general view of poets, the handling of the two actually present in *Symp.* renders it actually impossible that ‘of which all the poets are procreators’ could be taken as seriously and literally meant—unless, of course, Diotima is a real and independent individual, whose actual views S. (P.) is reporting. Since the evidence against this overwhelmingly strong, the ironic reading—for which *Apology* 22a-c would provide good background reading—seems inevitable.” C.J. Rowe, *Commentary on Plato: Symposium*, 190, n. 209a3-4.

this passage as a description of the thumotic soul suggests also that the kind of virtue spoken of here is not the complete, final, or best virtue attainable by man. So there is, in this sense, an ironic, mocking significance to the passage. On the other hand, the thumotic soul desires to be perceived as noble, good, and virtuous, and so engages in those activities that will help him gain such renown, without adequate attention to the true nature of his behavior or perhaps because, without reflection or contemplation, he takes conventional views on virtue to be the model for his behavior. In this sense, the description of this lover is most apt. Even the description of the poets⁴⁰⁴ as lovers of this sort makes sense in this context, for their odes praise and chronicle the sort of virtue that is valued by society; and any created likeness of virtue by the poets remains a likeness and so at best an image of actual virtue.

It can be seen from this, that the section of Diotima's discourse from 207a5 to 212b1 is organized in three parts that correspond to the divisions of the soul in the *Republic*, such that they reflect the appetitive, spirited, and rational elements of the soul. This section describes the lives of those who imitate mortality at the level of body and at the level of honor, parallel to the lives dominated by the lower two of the three elements of the soul articulated in the *Republic*.⁴⁰⁵ The lover who is initiated into the final mysteries of Eros has moved beyond both of these sorts of love and procreation; for his

⁴⁰⁴ Hesiod and Homer are cited as examples here, more perhaps for longevity than content. It is puzzling, for instance, that no mention is made of Pindar, who is so notable a poet if one is looking for a poet full of words on virtue and what makes men good.

⁴⁰⁵ Rowe links the passage regarding honor with *philotimia*, but does not link the preceding section to the appetitive element of the soul.

love and procreation are proper to the rational element in man so that even when he gazes merely on a beautiful body he generates *λόγοι*.

At the lower two levels of soul, there is evidence of the nature of Eros that is described in the theogonic account of his origins. The poverty of Eros is depicted in the sacrifice and suffering that is embraced by lovers for the sake of participation in immortality; parents are willing to forego certain pleasures, or to endure pain and hardship, in short to dwell with poverty, as a means or way to ensuring the well-being of their offspring. Similarly poets and craftsmen willingly endure hardships for the sake of their ‘immortal offspring’—those works of art or laws or famous deeds that history should not forget—and in this sense, they too embrace poverty as a means or way to a share in temporal immortality. The lover who is not directed toward love of such images of virtue and such temporal, worldly immortality, is the lover who enters upon the Greater Mysteries of Eros, those which are proper to the rational part of the soul. The immortality to which he aspires is divine, for his final end will be to dwell with the Form of beauty itself. Diotima indicates that the lover who begins the ascent at the rational level is already apprised of the workings of Eros at all of these other levels, not only with regard to the soul, but also with regard to the work of Eros as a cosmic force that animates and perpetuates the cosmos and its inhabitants.⁴⁰⁶ It is at this level that the full force of all that has gone before is brought to bear.

⁴⁰⁶ “ ‘Into these aspects of erotics, perhaps, S., you too could be initiated’: evidently (see e.g. *Gorgias* 497c, with scholiast; and Burkert 1983:266) initiation into the Lesser (or ‘Small’) Mysteries, at Agrae (‘in the city’), was a necessary qualification for initiation into the Great(er), at Eleusis; and on any account it must be true that S. will have needed to learn what has gone before in order even to begin to grasp what follows. But Diotima’s main point is just about the relative importance, and difficulty, of the two sets of ideas; it hardly matters that the real Greater Mysteries were evidently not particularly

Diotima marks the beginning of a new section of her speech and of her teaching with the following words:

Into these aspects of erotics, perhaps, Socrates, you too could be initiated; but as for those aspects relating to the final revelation, the ones for the sake of which I have taught you the rest, if one approaches these correctly—I don't know whether you would be capable of initiation into them. Well, she said, I'll tell you this next part, and spare no effort in doing so: and you must try to follow, if you can. It's like this, she said. The person who turns to this matter correctly must begin, when he is young, to turn to beautiful bodies, and first, if the one leading him leads him correctly, he must fall in love with a single body and there procreate beautiful words....⁴⁰⁷

Her speech clearly indicates a turning point in the description both of erotics and the human participation in immortality through procreation. Diotima distinguishes this passage as containing the highest mysteries of Eros. The preceding teachings⁴⁰⁸ were

difficult...*Pace* Riedweg 1987:2-29, it is unnecessary to go back and re-read Diotima's preliminaries in the light of the new image, which is suggested above all by the idea of the final vision of Beauty (210e-212a)." Rowe, Commentary on *Plato: Symposium*, 193, n. 209e5-210a1.

⁴⁰⁷ *Symp.* 209e5.

⁴⁰⁸ Diotima has throughout utilized language from the mystery religions, and her language here designates what is to follow as *ἐποπτικός* (highest mystery). If we are to take the descriptions of human participation in immortality that begin at 207c5 as a parallel to the initiation rites of mystery religion, we might recognize that there is an analogous movement from concern with body to concern with soul. Whether the activities described at each level are intended as prescriptions for behavior rather than as descriptions of the activities characteristic of souls dominated by one of the two lower elements is dubious. It is not, at any rate, necessary to read these two lower levels as an indication of prescribed action, as Guthrie notes that *τελετά* can indicate sacred writings as well as initiatory rites. W. K. C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 201-204. With this in mind, it is not difficult to understand all that Diotima transmits as a teaching and not a blueprint for action. Thus, *contra* Nussbaum's suggestion in *The Fragility of Goodness*, there is no reason to suppose that any part of Diotima's discourse recommends promiscuity *en route* to the vision of the beautiful itself. See page 181, where she writes that "we can perhaps, though with difficulty, get ourselves, in imagination into the posture of seeing bodies as

necessary, but seem undesirable as ends to pursue in themselves, since they are, as Diotima emphasizes, for the sake of the final revelation. This is an indication that the lover who pursues these highest mysteries must already have been initiated into the Lesser Mysteries, and that he knows the things about erotics that Diotima has thus far explained. Her language here also indicates that what follows is a description of the *correct* way of pursuing erotics and so also that the preceding ways are deficient, since she describes the would-be lover as “wanting to search after or pursue correctly” (*ὀρθῶς μετίη*) the highest mysteries, distinguishing qualitatively the activity of this lover sharply from those of the two preceding lovers. Twice more, in the space of five lines, Diotima emphasizes the *ὀρθός* quality of the way the lover must proceed in order to achieve the final revelation.⁴⁰⁹

Within these same lines, Diotima moves between referring to the lover’s progress as his own seeking and as his following another. Her first description of this lover, using the subjunctive form of *μέττειμι*, indicates a searching after, or following after. Her second formulation states the necessity of “going correctly” (*ὀρθῶς ἰόντα*), and is followed by the first mention of a leader (*ἡγούμενος*) who is responsible for leading his youth correctly. The verbs used in both places are ambiguous; it is unclear whether the one embarking on these final mysteries is seeking or being led. The significance of the leader at 210a6 is also ambiguous. It is not clear who the leader is; in the traditional pederastic relationship,

qualitatively interchangeable with one another—because we have, or can imagine having, relevant experiences of promiscuity or of non-particularized sexual desire.”

⁴⁰⁹ *Symp.* 210a2-6.

one would expect the lover to be leading the beloved.⁴¹⁰ But Diotima's depiction of Eros throughout her speech has been from the perspective of a lover who seeks his beloved, so this seems implausible. Rowe suggests that:

If we follow out the metaphor of the Mysteries, 'the one leading him' will be a *mystagôgos*, someone who guides the new initiates. In the real Mysteries, this will apparently have been a person already initiated and responsible for keeping the new initiates both in order and informed...in the present context the 'mystagogue' will be someone already initiated in, i.e. experienced in, 'loving correctly', but also, insofar as the initiate's progress will be a philosophical one (see e.g. d4-6n.), in philosophy.⁴¹¹

It is possible, however, that this leader is none other than the daimon Eros described earlier by Diotima, and this would not be incompatible with the understanding of a daimon as mystagogue. If such were the case, the daimonic possession of the lover would lead him through the stages of loving correctly, and yet this same lover would be seeking and active in his own right.

This model of divine possession helps to answer the question of how the lover moves from one stage of the ascent to the next, since the daimon is able to cause motion in the human being. It does not seem, however, to be the complete answer. The allusions to mystery religions, the description of the lover as "going correctly", and the description of the actions of the lover at each stage of the ascent, together suggest that Diotima is describing a practice, analogous to religious ritual that, if employed, will assist the lover in his progress. The description of Eros as a "co-worker (*συνεργός*) with human nature" at the end of Socrates' encomium also emphasizes the joint contributions of Eros and

⁴¹⁰ Such a reading would be supported by the explicit mention of correct pederasty at the end of the ascent passage, though the existence of meaning on this level does not exclude the possibility of others.

⁴¹¹ Rowe, 194, n. 210a6-7.

human beings.⁴¹² In the examination of the ascent passage itself, then, how are the contributions of Eros and the lover revealed? What does our understanding of Eros as an intermediate who is both *πενία* and *πόρος* contribute to an understanding of the ascent passage? In what sense can this section of the dialogue be seen as a continuation of the explanation of the desire for immortality as *αίτια*? How does the understanding of the ascent passage as an expression of this desire for immortality as proper to the rational element influence its interpretation?

The very first stage of the lover's progress presents a structure and motion that is reiterated in subsequent stages. The lover first loves a single beautiful body, and in doing this, generates beautiful *λόγοι*. The lover then realizes "that the beauty that there is in any body whatever is the twin of that in any other"; or, conceived more generally, that there is some other beautiful object of the same kind as his beloved object.⁴¹³ From this realization, he moves to the realization that beauty exists in all objects of this same sort, in this case, all bodies; his love is extended to include all instances of this beauty, in this case, beauty of all bodies. The result, then, of loving one particular sensible body is the recognition that it shares something with other beautiful bodies, such that for the one who wishes to "pursue beauty of outward form, it's quite mad not to regard the beauty in all bodies as one and the same."⁴¹⁴ Thus, from the love of all bodies comes the realization that there is something shared or universal in the beauty that belongs to bodies; it is this

⁴¹² *Symp.* 212b3-4

⁴¹³ *Symp.* 210b1-3.

⁴¹⁴ *Symp.* 210b1-3

recognition of the universal beauty of bodies that prompts the lover to regard the beauty of a single body as something paltry and to love it less.

This is the first instance of a recurring realization and movement on the part of the lover. At each stage of the lover's progression, he begins by loving a particular kind of object, generates something as a result of his love, and proceeds to the recognition that the beauty in his beloved object is only one instance of the beauty he seeks. At the first two stages, this discovery leads him to think⁴¹⁵ that the beloved object is trivial (*σμικρός*), and so to be less ruled by his beloved, as at the first stage he is said "to relax this passionate love for one body."⁴¹⁶ There are two moments of poverty in this movement. The first occurs as a result of the lover's generation; his very loving causes him to pour himself out and thus to become poor. The lover is then filled again with a greater vision of beauty, one that is more universal than his last. After this comes the second moment of poverty, when the lover recognizes the smallness of the beauty he first loved and releases himself from its hold.

Once the lover loves all bodies, he moves on to the recognition of beauty of soul without, it appears, first recognizing the triviality of physical beauty. Rather, the lover recognizes that beauty of soul is *τιμιώτερος*—more honorable—than beauty of body. Again, at this level, the lover loves a single object, in this case a beautiful soul, and consequently procreates *λόγοι*. This time, however, the *λόγοι* are both begotten and sought after, and they are of a particular kind, those "that will make young men into better

⁴¹⁵ *ἐννοέω* at 210b4, *ἡγέομαι* at 210b3, b7, c7.

⁴¹⁶ *Symp.* 210b5

men.”⁴¹⁷ In generating *λόγοι* that will “make young men into better men” the lover will have cause to think about practices, customs, and laws, as those things that are designed to teach and guide the young.⁴¹⁸ Customs and laws are both products of convention; they have been alluded to previously in the section regarding the honor lover in the reference to governance of cities and households that is connected to the discussion of virtue as “things that it is fitting for the soul to conceive and to bring to birth.”⁴¹⁹

The lover, who is still by virtue of the initial description himself being led, at this stage seems to find his own beloved and so to become a leader of sorts himself. He delivers *λόγοι* to his beloved in order to improve him; he loves and cares for the boy, so that at this level there is an indication that the beloved object is tended by the lover, where there was not at the prior level. Because he wants to improve the beloved, the

⁴¹⁷ *Symp.* 210c2-3

⁴¹⁸ “ ‘And gives birth to the sorts of words—and seeks for them—that will make young men into better men’: the words ‘and seeks’ (delayed also in the Greek) are frequently bracketed by editors, but on inadequate grounds. Thus Dover says ‘the...seeker has already found his partner...’, he does not “seek” arguments [*logoi* in the Greek: it seems better to keep the more neutral ‘words’], and *toioutous* [‘the sorts of’] obviously looks forward to *hoitines*...[‘that will...’]’; but as Sier sees, it is exactly the lover’s *seeking* for things of the right kind to say that will ‘*compel*’ him to ‘contemplate beauty as it exists in kinds of activity...’ (c4: he will *have* to look at the different kinds of things people do, etc., if he is going to ‘care for’ his beloved), and it is also what makes sense of ‘that *will* make young men into better men’. (The general point was seen by Stallbaum and Rettig in the last century; Bury unfortunately rejects their defence of ‘and seeks’ as ‘futile’.) Since the lover is being guided and taught, it surely fits that he shouldn’t have the right sorts of *logoi* off pat—he’s bursting with ideas, but will also need to do some *seeking*, *inquiring* (presumably with his guide, but no doubt also with his beloved). If Love, and the lover, is a philosopher (see d4-6n.), this should hardly come as a surprise; contrast the lover of 209b8-c1, or indeed our lover at the beginning (210a7), both of whom do have things off pat, in a way distinctly unlike Diotima’s picture of the perpetually indigent Love. In short, removing ‘and seeks’ is not only unjustified, but does some damage to the argument” (Rowe, *Symposium*, 195, n. c2-3).

⁴¹⁹ *Symp.* 209a2.

lover is “compelled...to contemplate beauty as it exists in kinds of activity and in laws, and to observe that all of this is mutually related, in order that he should think beauty of body a slight thing.”⁴²⁰ Upon the realization that the beauty of laws and practices is shared and universal, again the lover realizes that the beauty that attracts him is present not only in physical manifestations, but also in the human soul and those human creations—laws and practices—that can cause it, i.e. the soul, to grow in beauty. And, once again, the realization of this beauty causes the lover to think differently about beauty of different kinds, namely that of body, for he realizes that beauty to be *σμηκρός* when compared to the beauty he has seen in laws and practices. Thus we can see that the lover begins to love that beauty which is further removed from physical particulars, so that his love for an object is proportional to its place in a hierarchy that begins with one particular body and extends to the universal principles embedded in practices and laws. But, this sort of principle is not yet the highest, and so the lover continues his ascent.

The next manifestation of beauty the lover gazes upon is that in “the different kinds of knowledge”, and this stage is marked by several differences from those that have preceded. It is first notable that this contains the first clear statement that the lover is “no longer slavishly attached to the beauty belonging to a single thing—a young boy, some individual human being, or one kind of activity.”⁴²¹ This stage is also marked by a strong ambiguity in the language of leading. The image of the lover being led, obscure from the outset, was turned about at the prior stage, as he became the leader of a beloved. At this

⁴²⁰ *Symp.* 210c4-7.

⁴²¹ *Symp.* 210d1-3.

level, there is no explicit mention of his beloved, and the Greek formulation⁴²² further obscures the personages doing the leading and being led. The third rather remarkable feature of this stage is that the lover himself, because he is “no longer slavishly attached to the beauty belonging to a single thing...may cease to be worthless and petty (*σμικρολόγος*).”⁴²³ This is striking because at the previous stages, the lover recognizes some object external to himself as *σμικρός*; in this case, however, though his vision of beauty continues to grow to include more universal objects, Diotima does not state that he finds either activities (*ἐπιτηδεύματα*) or kinds of knowledge (*ἐπιστήμη*)⁴²⁴ trivial as a consequence of his increased vision. Rather it is the case that the lover himself becomes a person not concerned with trivialities or caught up in them because he does not devote himself exclusively to one person, custom, or activity; hence he is not ruled by any of these things. This poverty with respect to individual objects of affection is echoed in the passage that follows, in the description of the lover procreating beautiful “words and

⁴²² “ ‘After activities, he must lead him to the different kinds of knowledge’: the translation here accurately represents the Greek in not identifying either the subject or the object of the ‘leading’, but the Greek even omits the ‘he’ and the ‘him’. In a way not explicit identification is needed; we know who is doing the leading (the leader) and who is being led (the lover). However the sudden use of the transitive verb, with no subject, and with the likely candidate for the role last mentioned seventeen lines ago (in a6), is striking (that the object is unspecified is less so, since the obvious candidate for that role has been present all the time). Nor, if there are two relationships involved (guide/lover, lover/beloved), is the question ‘who must lead who?’ obviously otiose. In that case, it is not unreasonable to suspect a deliberate ambiguity: perhaps both guide must lead lover, and lover the beloved (that is, on separate occasions)? It is already fairly clear, after all, that both lover and beloved will progress; and if they do, they presumably do in the same way” (Rowe, *Symposium*, 196, n. c7-8.)

⁴²³ *Symp.* 210d1-3. This is the last occurrence of *σμικρός* or its compounds in Diotima’s speech.

⁴²⁴ For a useful discussion of *ἐπιστήμη* and its relation to practices (*ἐπιτηδεύματα*) and virtue, see John Rist, *Eros and Psyche: Studies in Plato, Plotinus, and Origen*, 115-156.

thoughts in a love of wisdom that grudges nothing.”⁴²⁵ For the abundance of the lover—his procreation of beautiful words and thoughts—is of a piece with his freedom from the kind of Eros that dominates a lover obsessed by his beloved. This disposition, the love of wisdom that grudges nothing, is the state the lover must achieve if he is to attain the vision of the beautiful itself.

But instead, turned towards the great sea of beauty and contemplating that, [he] may bring to birth many beautiful, even magnificent, words and thoughts in a love of wisdom that grudges nothing, until there, with his strength and stature increased, he may catch sight of a certain single kind of knowledge, which has for its object a beauty of a sort I shall describe to you.⁴²⁶

It is only after the lover has achieved this state, in which he is himself no longer *σμιχρολόγος*, that he is able to “catch sight of a certain single kind of knowledge,”⁴²⁷ that of beauty itself.⁴²⁸ It is in catching sight of beauty itself that the lover is moved to the final stage of the ascent.

Each stage of the ascent has described the disposition of the lover toward potential objects of affection; at this level, his gaze moves upward from “kinds of knowledge” or, more properly perhaps, multiplicity of knowledge to “catch sight of a

⁴²⁵ *Symp.* 210d5-6.

⁴²⁶ *Symp.* 210d3-7.

⁴²⁷ *Symp.* 210d6-7.

⁴²⁸ Good was earlier substituted for beauty at 204e1-3; the daimon Eros was described as intermediate between the beautiful and ugly, wisdom and ignorance, immortal and mortal, good and bad; there is perhaps, then, good reason to view the beautiful, good, immortal, and wisdom as coextensive, though not as identical. Participation in the immortal, then, is also participation in the good, the beautiful, and the wise; but to participate or share in it is not to be the same as it.

certain single kind of knowledge.”⁴²⁹ Where before the lover beheld the beauty belonging to knowledge generally, as knowledge of various things exists in its various forms, now the lover will behold a knowledge that seems to sit above the rest, and this is knowledge of beauty itself, the beauty by which all other knowledge is made beautiful. It is at this level that Diotima describes life⁴³⁰ as “worth living for a human being, in contemplation of beauty itself.”⁴³¹ The final goal of loving and living, then, is to engage in the activity of contemplating beauty. As the lover gazes at this highest beauty, once again, he will recognize that it is a finer thing than all of the other beautiful objects, that it is not “of the same order as...gold, and clothes, and the beautiful boys and young men.”⁴³² And at this level the lover procreates “true virtue”; but following from this, “it belongs to him to be loved by the gods, and to him, if to any human being, to be immortal.”⁴³³

Rowe suggests that “the general upshot [of the ascent passage] is that the conversion away from the individual—whether lover or beloved?—is an epistemological process, involving the acquisition of that ability to grasp the general/generic which is blocked by too great an attachment to the particular; that is, so the context seems to tell

⁴²⁹ *Symp.* 210d6-7.

⁴³⁰ The word for life here is *βίος*, a term associated with the way of life followed by Orphics and Pythagoreans. Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 301-304.

⁴³¹ *Symp.* 211d1-3.

⁴³² *Symp.* 211d3-7.

⁴³³ *Symp.* 212a2-7.

us, to particular, physical, instantiations of beauty.”⁴³⁴ While the epistemological process does seem to serve as the analogue here, it seems that the context and purpose of the dialogue demand an application in terms of affectivity, so that Rowe’s phrase “too great an *attachment* to the particular” is more to the point. What is described in the ascent passage is certainly proper to the soul considered as a rational being, and particularly in terms of his rational element, but considered here insofar as it is erotic or affective.

The continued presence of *γένεσις* and *τίκτω* link the ascent passage back to the discussion of procreating and begetting as participation in immortality, and so also to the discussion of the *αἰτία* of Eros. In the context of this discussion, the ascent passage follows the descriptions of the two lower parts of the soul participating in immortality through the kind of procreation available to each of them, and so may be viewed as descriptive of the erotic movement of the rational element as it participates in immortality. If the *αἰτία* are to be the Forms, then the Form of both Eros and *ἐπιθυμία* is the desire for immortality, and so what follows is a description of the various ways that the cosmos and its inhabitants strive to become like the Forms; for the rational element in human beings, the process involves the distancing of the soul or mind from the particularity, changeability, and sensuality of the material world. The structure of this section of Diotima’s speech as a description of the ways in which the parts of the soul participate in immortality also suggests that the immortality participated in at the highest level of the ascent passage is more akin to divine immortality than it is to temporal or mortal immortality. Just as the powers of the soul exist within an hierarchical order, so also do the activities that are its participations in immortality. The lower parts of soul are

⁴³⁴ Rowe, *Symposium*, 197, n. c8-d3.

only able to participate in immortality in the way Diotima describes as proper to mortals, by leaving images of themselves behind in the temporal realm. Such immortality is distinguished from divine immortality: “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.”⁴³⁵

The immortality attributed to the lover who achieves the highest stage of the ascent and beholds beauty itself seems to be of this divine order; for in the course of the ascent, he has himself been transformed and become more like the Forms his soul desires. In his beholding them and dwelling with them, he shares in the immortality that is theirs, that of always being the same.

⁴³⁵ *Symp.* 208b1.

CHAPTER SEVEN

κάθαρσις AND THE PURIFICATION OF EROS

The themes of impiety and hubris appear throughout the *Symposium*. The first and last speeches are given by men who will be tried for crimes of impiety toward the Eleusinian mysteries, Phaedrus and Alcibiades. And, as noted in chapter three, the dialogue presents two members of the drinking party as charging Socrates with hubris, Agathon at the beginning of the party, and Alcibiades at the end. But this charge of hubris is subtly countered in the drama of the *Symposium* by Socrates' evident poverty, and poverty appears throughout the dialogue as a counterpoint to this worst of all possible kinds of greed that is the ruin of man.

The kind of poverty we find at the center of Eros's nature is closely associated with *σωφροσύνη*, or temperance, the very virtue which requires of humans that their desires be ordered toward the right things and to the proper degree, the virtue that supplants greed. The practice of this virtue is the practice of poverty, and entails the turning of the soul away from material goods and pleasures toward the more substantial goods and pleasures that belong to the soul as a consequence of its very nature. The *Phaedo* describes this transformation of the soul as practicing for death, and this practice itself is called *κάθαρσις*. The *κάθαρσις* described in the *Phaedo* parallels the ascents of the soul to the vision of the Good and the Beautiful described in the *Republic* and *Symposium*.⁴³⁶ This parallelism suggests that the processes described in the *Republic* and

⁴³⁶*Resp.* 7. 514a1-520d5, *Symp.* 210a5-211e6, *Phd.* 99e1-100e1. See also Kenneth Dorter, "Three Disappearing Ladders," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 29, no. 3 (1996): 279-99.

Symposium are cathartic processes. In the case of the *Symposium* itself, this implies that the effect of Eros rightly directed, is *κάθαρσις*, and that the elucidation of various levels of ascent to the vision of the Beautiful is an elucidation of the stages of this *κάθαρσις*.

Where the *Phaedo* describes *κάθαρσις* in terms of man's rational element, however, the *Symposium* describes a *κάθαρσις* of man's affective element. In what follows, I will discuss the nature of *κάθαρσις*, the concept of *κάθαρσις* put forward in the *Phaedo*, and show how this conception of *κάθαρσις* is present in the *Symposium*'s presentation of Eros as comprising Poverty and Resource.

The Concept of Κάθαρσις in the Phaedo and the Sophist

In the *Phaedo*, the true philosopher (*ὁρθός φιλόσοφος*) is described as practicing for death,⁴³⁷ and this practice, insofar as it aims for the separation of the soul from the pollution of the body, is described as *κάθαρσις*. The term *κάθαρσις* itself has several applications, descriptive of the purification needed by the body for physical health, descriptive of the purification of both body and soul needed by initiates of mystery religions, and finally descriptive of the philosophical process by which the soul is purified of the confusion and misdirection that results from its communion with the body.⁴³⁸ We might, then, distinguish three distinct senses of *κάθαρσις*: medical (of the

⁴³⁷ *Phd.* 63e6-64b6.

⁴³⁸ Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 75-84; Leon Golden, "Katharsis as Clarification: An Objection Answered," *The Classical Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (May 1973): 45-6; Leon Golden, "Catharsis," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 93 (1962): 51-60; Golden, "Mimesis and Katharsis", *Classical Philology* 64, no. 3 (July 1969): 145-53; Golden, "The Purgation Theory of Katharsis," *The Journal of Aesthetics*

body), religious (ritual purifications of both body and soul), and philosophical. Though Plato's sense of *κάθαρσις* in the *Phaedo* is primarily philosophical, it seems best understood in relation to and as arising from the others. Evidence from both the *Phaedo* and the *Sophist* shows that Plato applies the concept of *κάθαρσις* to both body and soul. In the *Sophist*, Plato identifies *κάθαρσις* as a kind of separation and distinguishes purification of the body from that of the soul.⁴³⁹ In the *Phaedo*, Plato presents *κάθαρσις* as necessary for the proper attitude toward bodily pleasures as well as for the proper orientation of the soul toward the divine, suggesting both a kind of bodily *κάθαρσις* and a spiritual-intellectual one.

Each of the kinds of *κάθαρσις* mentioned above requires a cleansing, and it is by means of this cleansing that a certain kind of health is achieved; that which cleans the physical, leads to physical health; that which cleans the spiritual and intellectual to spiritual and intellectual health. In the *Phaedo*, Plato describes a *κάθαρσις* that benefits the health of the whole soul, so that his description of the philosophical life is not limited to describing the life of a rational ego, but encompasses the desires and passions shared with animals, the passions singular to man in his aspirations to glory and fame, and the passion most singular to man in his desire for truth.⁴⁴⁰ Plato's presentation of *κάθαρσις* in the *Phaedo* has three distinct aspects: (1) it is necessary for the proper attitude toward

and Art Criticism 31, no. 4 (Summer 1973): 473-9; Liddel, Scott, and Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*.

⁴³⁹ *Soph.* 226d-227c.

⁴⁴⁰ In both the *Phaedo* and the *Symposium*, there is a distinction between what I here refer to as 'spiritual' and 'intellectual,' where spiritual is tied to the passions of the soul and intellectual to its apprehension of or participation in Forms.

bodily pleasures (2) it is necessary for the acquisition of pure knowledge, and so also for the proper orientation of the soul toward the divine (3) it involves a practice and a habituation of the soul, and so a way of life or ‘βίος’.⁴⁴¹

In the *Phaedo*, as in the *Sophist*, *κάθαρσις* is defined in terms of separation. The *Phaedo*’s initial definition of *κάθαρσις* is offered by Socrates:

And does not the purification (*κάθαρσις*) consist in this which has been mentioned long ago in our discourse, in separating, so far as possible, the soul from the body and teaching the soul the habit of collecting and bringing itself together from all parts of the body, and living, so far as it can, both now and hereafter, alone by itself, freed from the body as from fetters?⁴⁴²

Κάθαρσις, as a process of separating the soul from the body, and as the teaching of a habit, is a kind of practice. This means, on the one hand, that the *κάθαρσις* is not achieved all at once and in one moment. It also means that the actual doing, the activity, of *κάθαρσις* is repeated. Whatever this activity turns out to be, it will be an activity that must be done repeatedly, and, since the end of this activity is separation from the body, the repetition of the activity that achieves this end will move the soul gradually toward its purification. The repetition is not merely the doing of the same thing over and again, but the doing of an activity at increasing levels of perfection. There is a second sense in which the activity associated with *κάθαρσις* is not merely replication, for the *κάθαρσις* the philosopher undertakes is one of both body and soul. This is illustrated in the *Phaedo*’s discussion of practicing for death.

⁴⁴¹ The sought-after knowledge in the *Phaedo* is described in terms of purity at 65a and 66b ff. The soul becomes pure in order to acquire the knowledge it wishes to be like.

⁴⁴² *Phd.* 67c4-d2.

The practice for death that Plato describes in the *Phaedo* involves a *κάθαρσις* of both the body and the soul. One reason that the philosopher in the *Phaedo* is presented as practicing for death (or dead already) is his attitude toward worldly or temporal goods. This is in fact one reason that Simmias gives for most people's poor opinion of philosophers—they seem so insensible as to be dead already.⁴⁴³ The philosopher does not “care much about the so-called pleasures, such as eating and drinking...[and] the pleasures of love...the possession of fine clothes and shoes and the other personal adornments.”⁴⁴⁴ Rather, Socrates proposes that the philosopher will either despise such things or desire them in a way that is proportional to their necessity for life.⁴⁴⁵ The philosopher, then, adopts an attitude that might be described as frugal; he does not reject bodily goods and pleasures altogether, but rejects the attitude that seeks these goods more than they are necessary, to the exclusion of other more important goods. In this respect, the philosopher lives a life of poverty; part of his practicing for death involves disdain for material goods, bodily pleasures, and the indulgences of the dandy. The *κάθαρσις*, or separation from the body, regards the necessary desires described in the *Republic*,⁴⁴⁶ and thus also entails a proper disposition toward the pleasures associated with these desires.

The philosopher's practice for death is not limited to purification from pleasures associated with the body, but includes also purification from knowledge associated with the body, that which is gained by means of sensation. Even the best of the senses, i.e.

⁴⁴³ *Phd.* 64a11-b8.

⁴⁴⁴ *Phd.* 64d1-5.

⁴⁴⁵ *Phd.* 64d7-e1.

⁴⁴⁶ *Resp.* 558d-559b.

sight and hearing, yield only inaccurate knowledge.⁴⁴⁷ Sense knowledge, and so the body, do not seem to bring the soul to pure knowledge. Pure knowledge, in this case, is “to understand the true essence of each thing”⁴⁴⁸ and is best achieved by one “who employs pure, absolute reason in his attempt to search out the pure, absolute essence of things”.⁴⁴⁹ Plato’s description of the soul’s separation from the body indicates that the separation from the body, accomplished completely only in death, involves the withdrawal of the soul, so far as possible, from its sharing in the activities of the body. The separation at which the soul aims is akin to the separation ascribed to the Forms, for it is only the soul that is *καθαρὸς* that will dwell with the Forms after its final separation from the body.⁴⁵⁰

The soul’s best disposition in this life is described here:

But it thinks best when none of these things troubles it, neither hearing nor sight, nor pain nor any pleasure, but it is, so far as possible, alone by itself, and takes leave of the body, and avoiding, so far as it can, all association or contact with the body, reaches out (*ὁρᾷται τοῦ ὄντος*) toward the reality.⁴⁵¹

This passage makes clear that the *κάθαρσις* of the soul applies both to the activities of thinking and sensing. In one sense, this indicates that the philosopher’s practice applies both to mind and body. The *Phaedo* is concerned with how we can think well, and the ways in which our body interferes with this, through its material needs, desires,

⁴⁴⁷ *Phd.* 65a9-b8.

⁴⁴⁸ *Phd.* 65e5-6.

⁴⁴⁹ *Phd.* 66a3-4.

⁴⁵⁰ *Phd.* 80a1 ff.

⁴⁵¹ *Phd.* 65c3-9.

sensations, and perceptions. Nonetheless, there is an indication that even when the soul is “alone by itself” it desires in some sense, for it “reaches out toward” the Forms. The term Plato uses here is from the verb ‘ὀρέγω’, which may also mean “to yearn for” and is related to ‘ὄρεξις’ or desire. Given Plato’s identification of three different kinds of pleasure proper to three different powers of soul in the *Republic*, it seems that he is alluding to the desire and pleasure proper to the rational element here. This aspect of the rational element is central to understanding what rationality is for Plato; it is at the heart of the coincidence of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness, and the reason why one who seeks truth also seeks goodness.

The Method of Κάθαρσις

Subsequent to this description of the need for a *κάθαρσις* of the rational element in man, Socrates describes a method of ascending to the highest of (principles or realities). This “hypothetical method”⁴⁵² is itself a *κάθαρσις*, and describes the means by which the philosopher moves closer to knowledge of the Forms. Socrates’ brief description of this method begins with the assumption “that there are such things as absolute beauty and

⁴⁵² This passage of the *Phaedo* has been the subject of more than a little scholarly debate, which cannot be included here. For my purposes, the generally uncontroversial aspects of this passage are sufficient, namely that the employment of the hypothetical method will involve assent to the existence of Forms or realities and an upward motion from the lesser of these principles to the highest. For further discussion of this passage see R. S. Bluck, “ὐποθέσεις in the *Phaedo* and Platonic Dialectic,” *Phronesis* 2, no. 1 (1957): 21-31; Paul Plass, “Socrates’ method of hypothesis in the *Phaedo*,” *Phronesis* 5, no. 2 (1960), 103-115; Lynn E. Rose, “The *Deuteros Plous* in Plato’s *Phaedo*,” *The Monist* 50, no. 3 (July 1966): 464-474.

good and greatness and the like.”⁴⁵³ It is these absolute realities that cause things to be and to continue in existence.⁴⁵⁴ In giving an account or explanation of a thing, it is these absolute realities to which the true philosopher appeals. “...and when you had to give an explanation of the principle, you would give it in the same way by assuming some other principle which seemed to you the best of the higher ones, and so on until you reached the one which was adequate.” This is the procedure proper to philosophers.⁴⁵⁵

The method described is an ascent that works its way toward knowledge of the highest possible principle of explanation. The *κάθαρσις* here described can be thought of in terms of clarification, for it is by the removal of the nonessential elements that the philosopher comes to know what is essential, and so also comes to know the Form itself. Though the description given in this section of the *Phaedo* is a description regarding objects of knowledge, this same description applies to the philosopher’s knowledge of himself as a soul. As he separates himself from the matter of the body, from the mutability of the material world, and gathers his soul up into himself, his soul is separated from these things and becomes more itself. The nature of the soul itself is clarified by this process—a process of *κάθαρσις*.

Plato’s description of the hypothetical method offers a method for seeking the truth of things. Though the ultimate objects of knowledge are essences or realities, the end of philosophical method seems to encompass both disposition and attainment of this end. The method itself requires constant practice. With respect to both knowledge and

⁴⁵³ *Phd.* 100b6-8.

⁴⁵⁴ *Phd.* 101c2-11.

⁴⁵⁵ *Phd.* 101d3-e4.

the body, this account of *κάθαρσις* requires the philosopher to become distanced from certain things, to voluntarily undergo deficiencies. The hypothetical method itself involves a willingness to be deprived of one's current hypothesis—one's convictions, one's trusted reality—in order to come closer to pure knowledge. Cornford describes the *Phaedo*'s emphasis on the withdrawal of the soul from the body as having “brought out the ascetic strain in Socrates, the man of thought to whom the body with its senses and appetites is at best a nuisance.”⁴⁵⁶ But this is not to say, as Cornford goes on to note, that Socrates has “ignored or ‘abolished’ the passionate side of human nature...the man of thought was also the man of passion, constantly calling himself a ‘lover’.”⁴⁵⁷ Curious as it may seem, it is the relinquishing of passion that allows Socrates to become truly passionate; his willing poverty allows him to appreciate things according to their place in the cosmos. It is by not holding too tightly to bodily and material goods that one is freed from paying them constant attention; one is no longer ruled by longings for these transitory goods. Rather, by not clinging to them, one enjoys them when they present themselves, and does not suffer from worries about their cessation. One may be truly grateful for what is at hand, and truly present to the beauty and goodness of the moment. This is, as we have seen in chapter three, the disposition designated by ‘*ἄφρονος*’.

With respect to both knowledge and pleasure, the separation of soul from body is deemed necessary because the association and community (*κοινωνία* and *ὁμιλία*) with the body misleads the soul, directing it toward and making it like the inconstant and transitory nature of body and matter. As always with Plato, the soul becomes like the

⁴⁵⁶ Cornford, “The Doctrine of Eros in Plato’s *Symposium*,” 68.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

things on which it gazes and with which it spends its time. In terms of both the intellectual and moral lives, then, the soul's bodily habitation presents obstacles to it. The practice for dying is, in the case of the body and the soul, done in order to make the soul most like the realities that it resembles, i.e. the Forms.⁴⁵⁸

Virtue and κάθαρσις

After the initial discussion of κάθαρσις and its relation to sensation and pleasure, the *Phaedo* offers another definition of κάθαρσις:

And virtue which consists in the exchange of such things for each other without wisdom, is but a painted imitation of virtue and is really slavish and has nothing healthy or true in it; but truth is in fact a purification (κάθαρσις) from all these things [pleasures, pains, fears], and self-restraint and justice and courage and wisdom itself are a kind of purification (καθαρισμός). And I fancy that those men who established the mysteries were not unenlightened, but in reality had a hidden meaning when they said long ago that whoever goes uninitiated and unsanctified to the other world will lie in the mire, but he who arrives there initiated and purified will dwell with the gods. For as they say in the mysteries, “the thyrsus-bearers are many, but the mystics few”; and these mystics are, I believe, those who have been true philosophers.⁴⁵⁹

This second definition of κάθαρσις distinguishes between real and apparent virtue. In the two conceptions of κάθαρσις discussed above, the concept of purification and the practice for death were applied to the bodily appetites and the rational faculty. Here, these same concepts are applied to the moral virtues, and the conception of moral virtue that informs this application is built upon what was previously established with regard to bodily pleasures and pains. It becomes clear in this passage that moral virtue encompasses

⁴⁵⁸ *Phd.* 66b1-67b2.

⁴⁵⁹ *Phd.* 69b7-d2.

pleasures and pains that are not, strictly speaking, bodily. Such pleasures and pains are those Plato associates with the middle part of the soul in the *Republic*, and they are brought to mind here in part because of the emphasis on the virtue of courage.

The perfection of the soul is not a merely “rational” enterprise, for it must acquire virtues as well as knowledge. Truth is able to achieve this, and the virtues are described as “καθαρός”, which may indicate that they are the means of purification, but also that they are states of purification.⁴⁶⁰ This double meaning of καθαρός suggests that virtue, as a practice, is the means by which the soul is purified, but that this practice which by means of repetition becomes habit is thereby also a purified state or disposition. Virtue understood as a habit is thus a state of purification, but the actions that continue to flow from that habit are virtue as practice continuously enacted, and so also practice continuously purified. It is in this sense that κάθαρσις is thus both disposition and activity.

Also notable in the above passage is that it develops a distinction between real and apparent virtue, where apparent virtue involves a false ordering of pleasures and

⁴⁶⁰ “Katharsis is evidently contrasted with c2 katharmos: the state of purification—if the virtues are states—as opposed to what brings it about. Previously it was said that our purification from ordinary desires and fears was a condition of our acquisition of wisdom (see especially 66c-67b); now the claim seems to be that such purification is conditional on wisdom. ‘Wisdom’ here, however, is not the complete understanding of things which was talked about earlier (since that was said to be inaccessible to the philosopher while still alive), but simply a clear-minded appreciation of what is truly valuable (which is what will be available to the philosopher, and to him alone). C3-4 kai kinduneuosi kai oi tas teletas...katasantes “And so (kai: see Verdenius on 63a7) those who established tas teletas really do (kai: GP 321-3) seem...’ Despite the mention of bakxoi in d1, ai teletai probably refers to initiatory rites in general which written evidence from the fifth century on tends to associate with the name of Orpheus (see Burkert 1985, 296-7)...” (Rowe, *Phaedo*, 150, n. 69c1).

pains.⁴⁶¹ The false order of pleasures occurs when one pleasure is chosen as supreme and other pleasures are foregone for its sake. For example, a lover of money foregoes the pleasures of fine food and drink so that he can retain his money. Though he may appear moderate, he is not, since he checks his desires for fine food and drink only for the sake of a pleasure he has chosen to preference—that of having money. He has not purified himself of love for material goods in this instance, but developed instead a form of greed with respect to a particular object. This greed prevents him from loving and desiring higher goods, like the virtues themselves, that are proper to the soul. His actions and habits are also governed by this love that he has made supreme, so that all he does is ordered to achieving this one purpose—the accumulation of wealth. Plato's distinction here between real and apparent virtue emphasizes the importance of properly ordered desire, where the proper orientation of desire is made possible by knowing truth and thus what is truly desirable.⁴⁶²

The *Sophist* provides a clearer set of distinctions regarding *κάθαρσις*, distinguishing between *κάθαρσις* of soul and body, and then further distinguishing kinds of *κάθαρσις* proper to the soul itself. The two kinds of purification of the soul are based upon the two kinds of evil that may befall the soul. The first kind of evil that may befall

⁴⁶¹ It is further notable that Plato uses the term 'κόσμιος' at 68c9 in the discussion leading up to this passage to describe the soul characterized by *σοφροσύνη*. It is perhaps also significant that throughout this passage Plato uses *φρόνησις* to designate the virtue that governs the other three cardinal virtues that feature in this passage, i.e., courage, justice, and moderation. The use of *φρόνησις* rather than *σοφία* suggests the sort of practical knowledge that is both learned and taught (at least in part) by habitual action.

⁴⁶² This is especially significant because it emphasizes the importance of ordered desire, desire that is oriented toward truth; false ordering of desire is in fact sublimation of the Freudian sort, but Plato here clearly rejects this position.

the soul is disease, or discord, the “dissolution of kindred elements” in the soul, and this is called vice. The second kind of evil is deformity, “the want of measure” in the soul that makes itself evident in the soul’s motion, especially its cognitive motion, and this is called ignorance.⁴⁶³ When the motion of the soul repeatedly fails to hit its mark, this indicates a lack of measure or symmetry in the soul itself. This want of measure is the cause of the movement of the soul going astray and not hitting its mark. The Stranger describes this sort of ignorance as “the aberration of a mind which is bent on truth, and in which the process of understanding is perverted.”⁴⁶⁴

The *Sophist*’s description of the deformity of the soul as a want of measure implies that the motion or Eros of the soul is affected by the disposition of the soul itself. Purification removes these evils from the soul, leaving behind only what is good.⁴⁶⁵ As such, the purification described in the *Sophist* is therapeutic. The method of purification is not the same for both kinds of evil, but is specific to each. This passage from the *Sophist* shares with the *Phaedo* the principle of *κάθαρσις* as the means by which the soul is rid of those things that are detrimental to it, as well as the application of this principle to the moral and theoretical virtues alike. The soul is a thing with motion, and this motion is Eros. Eros has a natural or proper object, i.e., the Beautiful itself, and goes astray when it aims at this but does not hit it. A perversion of Eros in this sense would be, e.g., taking the beauty of a particular body as Beauty itself, because this would amount to confusing a particular instance of beauty with Beauty itself, and mistakenly

⁴⁶³ *Soph.* 228c1-4.

⁴⁶⁴ *Soph.* 228c9-2d.

⁴⁶⁵ *Soph.* 228d3-230e2.

taking this particular beauty as the proper object of Eros. The lover's mistake in this example becomes more apparent if we bear in mind the use and work of Eros discussed in chapter four. Teleologically, Eros is the human means to *εὐδαιμονία* and participation in divine immortality. The latter of these, in particular, is only achieved by the soul's vision of the Form of Beauty itself.

It is habituation that creates the measure and symmetry needed in the soul if Eros is to hit its mark—if it is to lead the soul to Beauty itself. In the *Sophist*, education and instruction are the cures for the ignorance that is exemplified in the soul's want of measure. Cornford suggests that the description of the *Symposium* depends on prior habituation, on having attained *σωφροσύνη*, the disposition of poverty. Poverty, at the levels of bodily appetite and *θυμός*, is the condition for the ascent in the *Symposium*. Poverty applied at the next level is a poverty of mind, but with regard to its desire for truth under the aspect of the beautiful. The rational order is also an aesthetic and moral order. As much as the soul desires to gaze on Beauty, its attitude or disposition toward its objects must remain free of graspingness and greed.

Croissant's exposition of *κάθαρσις* in *Aristote et les mysteres* shows that the mystery religions in general made use of music and rhythm within their rites to accomplish *κάθαρσις*.⁴⁶⁶ The divine enthusiasm achieved in the ritual supplants the enthusiasm that is characterized by imbalance, and in its place reestablishes balance and proportion. What is restored, according to Croissant, is balance and proportion; but she argues that Plato views this as a lesser achievement, (in the religious rituals), as it is a

⁴⁶⁶ Jeanne Croissant, *Aristote et les Mystères* (New York: Arno Press, 1979), 5-6, 8-9.

“physical” balance that is achieved.⁴⁶⁷ Indeed, this is the sort of balance that Plato describes in the *Republic* when he discusses the musical and physical education of the guardians. The important contribution of Croissant’s discussion is that it highlights the sense in which habituation is central to the concept of *κάθαρσις* that Plato appropriates from the mystery religions. The rituals and initiations there are practices that are designed, in part, to restore balance and proportion to the body and soul. It is by means of the periodic ritual dances that participants are relieved of ailments and restored to health; just as the body requires regular food and exercise to maintain itself, so also with the passions. The rituals and initiations are repetitious, they must from time to time be repeated. In this sense, the engagement in dance is both habit and responsible for maintaining disposition. The practice is engaged in at regular intervals, as any habit, and the consequence of the maintenance of this habit is the maintenance of a balanced and proportioned disposition.

As Croissant’s discussion indicates, the concept of purification is closely bound up with that of madness or *μανία*, since it is by *μανία* that *κάθαρσις* is achieved. As Burkert notes in *Greek Religion*, “the aim [of *μανία*], nonetheless, in reality and in myth, is to bring madness back to sense, a process which requires purification and the purifying priest.”⁴⁶⁸ The discussion of madness in the *Phaedrus* supports this description, especially in its account of the second kind of madness that frees people from evil by

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid. 17-18.

⁴⁶⁸ Burkert, 110.

means of *κάθαρσις*.⁴⁶⁹ For Plato in particular, it seems that *μανία* is not merely a means of returning to sense, but the means by which man transcends sense, and, by allowing himself to be possessed by a god, becomes divine himself. This divinization of the human being is at once the product of purification and the purified state of man, i.e., the soul liberated from the bondage of place and time.

In addition to this conception of *κάθαρσις* as restoring order via *μανία*, the mystery religions provide a conception of *κάθαρσις* as progressive and transformative. Burkert writes:

Every initiation means a change in status that is irreversible; whoever has himself initiated on the basis of his individual decision separates himself from others and integrates himself into a new group. In his own eyes the *mystes* is distinguished by a special relation to the divine, by a form of piety.⁴⁷⁰

The interpretation of *κάθαρσις* as not only a process, but also as the acquiring and maintaining of a disposition through habit and practice is supported by Plato's appropriation of the language and imagery of mystery religions in the *Phaedo* and the *Symposium*. This language appears in both the *Phaedo* and the *Symposium*. It seems we tend to think of a "process" in linear fashion, starting with A and ending with B, where A might be transformed by the process it undergoes in such a way that nothing of its original state remains. But neither the "process" of the *κάθαρσις*, nor the "process" of

⁴⁶⁹ *Phdr.* 244d; "The elaborate sentence characterizing this Dionysiac or initiatory madness (*μανια τελεστικη*, 265b) introduces many terms associated with cathartic procedure both in medicine and in the mysteries. They might be illustrated at length from the *Oresteia*, where the hero, driven mad by the 'ancient wrath' which has haunted his ancestry, is purified and absolved by Loxias, the 'physician-seer, reader of portents, and purifier of houses'. (Aesch. *Eum.* 62)" (Cornford, *Principium Sapientiae*, 74-5).

⁴⁷⁰ Burkert, 301.

ascent is such a thing; the process of purification makes A more what it essentially is by removing what is extraneous, on the one hand, and by the establishment of habit and disposition on the other. The establishing of a habit and disposition is gradual, and one action, every time it is performed, adds strength to the habit and grounds the disposition. The transformation that occurs, then, is not one that obliterates the beginning, but one that builds upon and further completes the individual engaged in the initiations. What is paradoxical is that this completion is a process more akin to refinement, where the individual becomes more truly herself by the progressive removal of what is inessential to her being. Like the movement toward truth in the *Phaedo*, and like the dialogical movement of the *Symposium* itself, the erotic ascent is a description of such a refinement.

In both dialogues, Plato appropriates language and imagery from mystery religions, and by their employment contributes to the conceptual framework of the process of *κάθαρσις*. In the *Phaedo*, the most significant terms employed are *τελετή*,⁴⁷¹ *βίος*,⁴⁷² *μελέτημα*.⁴⁷³ The term *τελετή* is used generally of the rituals belonging to mystery religions.⁴⁷⁴ *τελετή* designate the rituals and initiations in which a *mystes* would engage.

⁴⁷¹ *Phd.* 69b7, c3-4.

⁴⁷² *Phd.* 69d3.

⁴⁷³ *Phd.* 67d8, 82a.

⁴⁷⁴In his edition of the *Phaedo*, Archer-Hind notes that *τας τελετας* is not specific to a particular cult, but generally designated rituals belonging to any such cult, and so might indicate Orphic, Bacchic, or Eleusinian mysteries. His note on 69b7 reads “*τας τελετας*. It seems probable, as Stallbaum says, that the Orphic traditions are in Plato’s mind, not the Eleusinian mysteries. The line *πολλοί ναρθηκοφόροι μὲν βάκχοι δὲ τε παῦροι* is said by Olympiodoros to be Orphic; it occurs, slightly changed, in Anthology X 106. Plato is fond of borrowing terms of ritual, as in *Phaedrus* 250 C, *Laws* 759 C, *Timaeus* 44 C” (*The Phaedo of Plato*, edited with introduction, notes, and appendices by R. D. Archer-Hind, 2nd edition (Salem, NH: Ayer Co., 1988), 25-6). See also Brisson’s introduction to

Such initiations are frequently purificatory, but are also closely bound up with the way of life adopted by members of a particular cult. Such a way of life is designated by the term *βίος*. Burkert's description of the Pythagorean way of life, according to the oral teachings or *akousmata*, provides an illustration of the way that ritual and practice transform daily life:

To take the *akousmata* seriously means a disconcerting narrowing of life. As one rises or goes to bed, puts on shoes or cuts one's nails, rakes the fire, puts on a pot or eats, there is always a rule to be observed, something wrong to be avoided.⁴⁷⁵

Burkert's description draws our attention to the different ritualistic facets of religious life, and points to a distinction between the rituals and initiations of ceremony and those of daily life. Rituals and initiations are instances of ceremonial purification, but the daily rituals adopted by the practitioners of the religion are the stuff of the way of life, and it is these daily practices that are ultimately transformative of individual habits and dispositions. In this way, the *βίος* is a constant and continuous purification. The difficulty and arduous nature of such practice is indicated in the *Phaedo* by the term 'μελέτημα', which "is regularly used of practicing an activity requiring effort and attention."⁴⁷⁶

In the *Symposium*, the terms *τελετή* and *βίος* appear again, and the allusions to mystery religions, especially the cult of Demeter, are more vivid given the presence of a

Le Banquet, in which he notes that the term *τελετή* is synonymous with the initiations of mystery religions, indicating a lack of distinction between ritual and initiation.

⁴⁷⁵ Burkert, 303.

⁴⁷⁶ Rowe notes that the formulation at 67e5, "meletan + infinitive...is regularly used of practicing an activity requiring effort and attention" (Rowe, *Phaedo*, 144-5).

priestess, the depiction of an *ἀνοδος* or ascent, the specific naming of the mysteries at 209e and the description of the final vision of Beauty in terms of the final revelation of the mysteries, as *ἐποπτικός*. The understanding of *τελετή* and *ἐπιτήδευμα* as making up part of the *βίος* of the mystes is further clarified by the structure of the ascent to the vision of the Beautiful, which is itself described in terms borrowed from the Eleusinian mysteries.⁴⁷⁷

The use of religious language and imagery in the ascent passage, the centrality of the theogonic account of Eros, and the presentation of Eros as a daimon, together suggest that Plato intends his readers to understand Diotima's account within a religious context. This supports an understanding of the ascent passage as a kind of *κάθαρσις*. Though neither *κάθαρσις* nor *μανία* are explicitly named in the ascent passage, they are present in the imagery of the Eros-daimon, the poverty of Eros, and the imagery of the ascent passage. The *Phaedrus*' inclusion of Eros as one of the four kinds of madness lends further support to such an interpretation, but the evidence of the *Symposium*, with its portrayal of Eros as daimon, provides good grounds for considering the effects of Eros, i.e. possession by a daimon and thus *μανία*, as a purification.⁴⁷⁸ The connection between Eros and *κάθαρσις* is further suggested by the thematic development of Eros as bound to poverty that was discussed in chapter three.

If we adopt Burkert's description of the relationship between *μανία* and *κάθαρσις*, that "the aim [of *μανία*], nonetheless, in reality and in myth, is to bring madness back to sense, a process which requires purification and the purifying priest", then possession by

⁴⁷⁷ *Symp.* 210a1-2; Guthrie, *The Greeks and their Gods*, 287.

⁴⁷⁸ For the relationship between daimons and mania, see E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*.

the Eros-daimon is the *μανία* that is at the same time the *κάθαρσις* necessary for the soul's ascent to the Beautiful. This might be understood with respect to the various aspects of Diotima's account of Eros. The ambiguous leader of the lover in the ascent passage turns out to be the Eros-daimon, which moves the soul upward to the vision of Beauty. The ascent passage itself describes a gradual purification from association with the body, in a manner parallel to that described in the *Phaedo*. The lover who ascends is freed from and purified of the "hubris" of the body that is opposed to the poverty embodied in the Eros-daimon. In the *Phaedrus*, the person possessed by gods is purified of something and also produces something as a consequence of this purification, e.g. the Pythia of prophecy, the poet of poetry. In the *Phaedo*, the consistent notion of *κάθαρσις* is the deliverance or release of the soul from the fetters of its association with the body. In the *Symposium*, we see these senses of *μανία* combined. At every stage of the ascent passage, the lover is further separated from what is petty, material, and temporal; and at every instance of gazing on beauty, he produces something beautiful. His madness is not unlike those Plato describes in the *Phaedrus*, for just as the prophetess and the poet, he produces beautiful things as a consequence of divine possession.

The relationship between *μανία* and *κάθαρσις* captures the sense in which the Eros-daimon is at once Poros and Penia, at once moving forward and poor. Perhaps, more fundamentally, this relationship between madness and purification, resource and poverty, expresses a paradox of human existence. Pieper describes just such a paradox in his discussion of the *Phaedrus*:

On the one hand man is of such a nature that he possesses himself in freedom and self-determination; he can and must examine critically all that he encounters; he can and must give shape to his own life on the basis

of his insights. On the other hand this same autonomous man is nonetheless so much involved in the Whole of reality that things can happen to him and he can be dislodged from his own autonomy. This need not take only the form of forcible restriction. Provided that the man does not close himself off obdurately, it may take such a form that in the very loss of his self-possession another fulfillment is granted him, one attainable in no other way.⁴⁷⁹

The same strange duality that Pieper describes is present in Diotima's account of the lover's ascent to the Beautiful. The movement from one stage of the ascent to the next is dependent on the lover realizing the paltry nature of the beloved object, on his reflective interaction with the objects and persons around him. At the same time, Diotima refers time and again to a leader or teacher who guides the lover from one stage to the next, and, in the final vision of Beauty, the lover must wait for the Beautiful to reveal itself. The lover must do preparatory work, he must journey as far as he can on his own, but the final revelation comes to him from without, has its source outside of him, and he can only make himself receptive to it.

Conclusion: The Purification of Eros

As we have seen, Plato's use of the term 'κάθαρσις' shows that it is a process by which the soul separates itself from the body, and that this process brings the soul to the fulfillment of its own nature. In the *Phaedo*, this κάθαρσις applies not only to the rational part of the soul, but also to the appetitive parts of the soul, and because of this involves

⁴⁷⁹ Josef Pieper, *Enthusiasm and Divine Madness: On the Platonic Dialogue Phaedrus*, trans. by Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1964), 50-51.

both moral and intellectual virtue.⁴⁸⁰ The *κάθαρσις* described is not a merely linear process, but is transformative of the soul because through practice it instills habit and disposition, from which flow virtuous actions. To this concept of *κάθαρσις* the *Sophist* contributes an understanding of *κάθαρσις* as corrective of the motion of the soul, so that the purified motion is more able to hit the mark at which it aims. In the *Symposium*, Plato makes use of the language of the mysteries, whose initiations are cathartic, to describe a progressive and transformative *κάθαρσις* of rational affectivity. Loving rightly is the positive articulation of the process of purification, whose negative articulation is the poverty of Eros.

Though the *Phaedo*'s treatment of *κάθαρσις* remarks on the proper attitude toward necessary desires and the desires proper to the middle part of the soul, this treatment is given in terms of the soul's capacity for thinking, rather than loving. In the *Symposium*, on the other hand, we are presented with an account of how the soul moves from love of individual material beauty to love of the Beautiful itself. This, too, is a kind of purification of the rational soul, but with respect to the motion proper to the soul—Eros. Cornford compares this ascent to the Beautiful to the ascent described in the *Republic*:

Now in Diotima's discourse the Greater Mysteries of Eros take this for their point of departure. They describe the conversion of Eros from the love of a single beautiful person to the love of Beauty itself. The upward journey of emotion runs parallel to the upward journey of the intellect in

⁴⁸⁰ The relationship between the apparently simple and undivided soul of the *Phaedo* and the tripartite division of the soul in the *Republic* is well discussed by Archer-Hind in his introduction to the *Phaedo* (xxxii-xxxvi). He argues that the tripartite division of the soul does not indicate “different parts or kinds, but only different modes of the soul's activity under different conditions. The two lower *eide* are consequent upon the conjunction of soul with matter, and their operation ceases at the separation of soul from matter” (xxxiv).

the mathematical and dialectical studies of the *Republic*. The intellect soars from the world of sense to the source of truth and goodness; but the wings on which it rises are the wings of desire for the source of beauty. The true self, the divine soul, is not a mere faculty of thought and dispassionate contemplation of truth; it has its own principle of energy in the desire kindled by goodness in the guise of the beautiful. The intimations of immortality already discernible in the lower forms of Eros are now confirmed when its true nature is disclosed as a passion for immortality in an eternal world.⁴⁸¹

Cornford's remarks indicate, as does my own analysis in the last chapter, that the ascent of the *Symposium* properly applies to the rational element of the soul. The lesser mysteries of Eros that precede the ascent passage but are contained within the explanation of the effects of Eros describe the pleasures and activities proper to the irrational appetites and *θυμός*. The ascent passage itself, however, describes the ascent of the affectivity of the rational element itself.

Just as the soul can be misdirected in its thinking and knowing if it focuses on the transitory objects of the material world, so also can it be misdirected in its loving. The *κάθαρσις* described in the *Phaedo* advises the philosopher to beware of the ways in which sensation and sensible pleasure can mislead his thought. In similar fashion, Diotima's description of the ascent to the vision of the Beautiful advises the philosopher to move beyond the merely material and particular instantiations of beauty found in the sensible realm. The movement of ascent she describes moves from individual material instantiations of beauty, through beauties of soul and actions and upward toward their ground in Beauty itself.

Golden writes that the *κάθαρσις* of the *Phaedo* "is clearly a purification process by which the soul is freed of the admixture of the body and thus becomes able to

⁴⁸¹ Cornford, *Principium Sapientiae*, 85-6.

contemplate clearly.”⁴⁸² In similar fashion, as we saw in chapter six, the ascent to the vision of Beauty in the *Symposium* is a purification process; it, too, separates the soul from the confusions of the body, but with regard to its movement toward beautiful things, i.e., its rational affectivity. The consequence of this purification is the state of existential readiness described as *φιλοσοφία ἄφρονος*. This is the state Josef Pieper describes in his discussion of erotic madness in the *Phaedrus*:

However, Socrates’ speech does maintain that erotic emotion may also be one way in which man can partake of “the greatest blessings”—provided man does not corrupt the erotic emotion by, for example, refusing to pay the price of receptivity to the divine madness. The price is a surrender of his autonomy; he must throw himself open to the god, rather than lock the doors of his soul by choosing sensual pleasures alone.⁴⁸³

The lover must engage in the rituals and initiations of Eros, must learn the proper order of loving, and the proper order of beloved objects, and must learn to love them to the appropriate degree. Much of the practice involved in this learning is the practice of *σωφροσύνη*. But human *σωφροσύνη* yields only human immortality; divine immortality depends on the lover’s ability to wait in stillness and expectation for the vision of Beauty itself.

In his article “The Dialectic of Eros in Plato’s *Symposium*”, R. A. Markus writes that Plato “shows us love both as passivity subject to ethical evaluation and as the activity which performs this evaluation; as natural impulse and inclination as well as free, self-imposed inclination or duty.”⁴⁸⁴ This “duality of love”, Markus writes, is not unlike St.

⁴⁸² Golden, “Catharsis”, 56, n. 10.

⁴⁸³ Pieper, *Enthousiasm and Divine Madness*, 50.

⁴⁸⁴ Markus, 229.

Augustine's *ordo amoris*, insofar as it captures "the right order freely imposed on human love by human love itself."⁴⁸⁵ These last words suggest an understanding of the ascent passage of the *Symposium* that encompasses more than a depiction of the steps one must take in order to study erotics properly and attain its ultimate end, the vision of beauty; they suggest that the attaining of this end results in a transformation of the lover such that his love is manifested differently according to the goodness of the object loved. The ascent passage, then, accomplishes two things: the articulation of a method or practice by which one ascends to the ultimate vision and a description of the disposition or attitude of the true lover toward beautiful objects located at the various stages of the ascent.⁴⁸⁶

This *ordo amoris* of which Markus speaks is the consequence of the purification of Eros. If we return now to the *Symposium*, bearing in mind that the soul is a thing with motion, and that this motion is Eros, we can see the sense in which we might speak of a *κάθαρσις* of Eros. Speaking of an affective *κάθαρσις* of the soul involves the purification of the soul with respect to (1) the objects loved, (2) the order or priority of the objects loved, (3) the degree to which these objects are loved given their place in the cosmos, and (4) the motion or Eros itself of the soul insofar as it is teleologically ordered toward *εὐδαιμονία* and participation in divine immortality. All of these aspects are contained within the ascent passage, both as a description of the method of *κάθαρσις*, and as the state achieved by the lover who makes the ascent. In the penultimate stage of the ascent, the lover is depicted as procreating in 'φιλοσοφία ἄφθονος', or "a love of wisdom that grudges

⁴⁸⁵ Markus, 229.

⁴⁸⁶ The final speech of the *Symposium*, given by Alcibiades, provides the reader with a concrete example of this ordered love in the person of Socrates.

nothing.”⁴⁸⁷ This love of wisdom that grudges nothing is the sought after state of the true lover and necessary predisposition for his seeing pure (*καθαρός*) beauty. In ‘φιλοσοφία ἄφρονος’ is an Eros that entails a kind of poverty, but one that is chosen, and in the course of the ascent cultivated, by the lover. The lover is thus himself transformed in the course of the ascent, as is the nature of his love for things around him. The lover’s soul itself becomes more like that which it loves most; in this sense too, the lover is transformed, for his soul becomes more like the *καθαρός* beauty that is the object of his love. The erotic ascent in the *Symposium* is a kind of *κάθαρσις*, and one that yields “a love of wisdom that grudges nothing.”

⁴⁸⁷ *Symposium* 210d5-6.

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