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BEAUTY OF SOUL AND SPEECH IN PLATO'S *SYMPOSIUM*

It is sometimes said, and more often assumed, that Alcibiades' speech in the *Symposium* adds nothing of substance to Diotima's account of love as related by Socrates.[1] In this article I argue to the contrary that Diotima's account of love cannot properly be understood without an understanding of Alcibiades' speech. In particular I argue, against the view of most scholars, that the important lesson to be learned from Diotima's teaching, when this is interpreted in the light of what Alcibiades says, is that the splendour of the 'true lover'[2] lies, not in his communion with Beauty, but in his beauty of soul and speech.

I begin by examining Diotima's account of love, and because my comments are often controversial I keep close to the text, at the risk of seeming to go over ground already gone over before.[3]

I

Diotima begins by describing love's nature (φύσις, 204b7).[4] Love is not beautiful or good, she says, nor is it ugly or bad; it is something in between. Nor again is it to be numbered among the gods, since it lacks (ἐνδεής ἐστιν, 202d2–3) what they always possess: it lacks what is beautiful and good.[5] But while love is not a god, and

[1] Taylor [33], 233, makes the assertion that Alcibiades' speech contributes nothing of importance to our comprehension of the Socratic or Platonic philosophy. In similar vein, Guthrie [13], 395, says that Diotima's 'lofty conclusion is the climax of the whole work, and a lesser writer might have made it the end'; Guthrie further asserts that the appearance of Alcibiades 'brings us back to earth', a sentiment re-echoed by Waterfield [35], xxxvii. When Grube [12], 96–105, discusses the *Symposium*, he summarises and comments on the speeches, but ends abruptly with that of Socrates; cf. Cornford [8], *passim* and Raven [29], 107–18. An influential exception to all of this is Nussbaum [23], who comes close to treating the speech of Alcibiades as the most important of the dialogue. However, her interpretation rests on a portrait of Socrates as a man of stone, unfeeling and obsessed with the non-individual – a man who, like the Forms, is 'hard, indivisible, unchanging'. The portrait that I find in the *Symposium* and elsewhere is of a man passionately concerned for the true good of other individuals – 'women, men and youngsters alike'.

[2] For the sake of convenience I use the expression 'true lover' to refer to the lover who has apprehended 'the true' (τοῦ ἀληθοῦς ἐφαπτομένῳ, 212a5) and is fully initiated in the rites of love.

[3] See especially White [36] & [37], *passim*. I take the view of the majority of scholars that Diotima speaks for Plato. For the contrary view, see Neumann [22], 34–7 and, more recently, Osborne [25], 56–7.

[4] The description of love's nature runs from 201e6 to 204c6. (Throughout this article my references are to Burnet's OCT.)

[5] The fact that *beautiful* and *good* are mentioned together here and elsewhere is often taken to mean that according to Plato these characteristics are the same and their terms interchangeable (e.g. Markus [21], 137, Taylor [33], 231), but the fact that *good* and *beautiful* go together no more means that they are the same than the fact that *equiangular* and *equilateral* go together in Euclidean geometry means that these are the same. What often influences the view that *good* and *beautiful* are the same is the conviction that the *Symposium's* Form of Beauty is identical with the *Republic's* Form of the Good: see e.g. Taylor [33], 231–2; Guthrie [13], 392; Hackforth [15], 55; Robin [30], xcviii; and, more recently, Brisson [2], 48 and Patterson [26], 207–10. For the opposite view, see White [36], *passim*.

therefore not immortal, it is not mortal either. It is something in between: it is a spirit and, like all spirits, it acts as a mediator between men and gods, binding them together. The reason for love's having this intermediary standing and possessing contrasting characteristics is that while his father was Resource his mother was Poverty; consequently he is poor, hard, homeless, shoeless and the like, and at the same time endlessly planning to acquire what is beautiful and good; he is brave, and he is a seeker after wisdom, which he does not possess, standing as he does between wisdom on the one hand and ignorance on the other (*σοφίας τε αὖ καὶ ἀμαθίας ἐν μέσῳ ἐστίν*, 203e5).

Having said this, Diotima remarks that Socrates had confused lover and beloved, mistakenly believing the lover[6] to be the beloved and consequently judging him to be all-beautiful (*πάγκαλος*, 204c3–4). The truth of the matter is that beauty belongs to the beloved (*καὶ γὰρ ἔστι τὸ ἐραστὸν τὸ τῷ ὄντι καλόν*, 204c4), the lover having a very different set of characteristics – those just ascribed to him (*ἄλλην ἰδέαν τοιαύτην ἔχον οἵαν ἐγὼ διῆλθον*, 204c5–6).

This identification of the beloved as the one who is beautiful is made use of throughout Diotima's account of love: it is the beloved, who *is* beautiful, that enables the lover, who is *not* beautiful,[7] to bring forth offspring and achieve immortality. The same identification will give rise in Alcibiades' speech to the paradoxical attribution to Socrates of being both lover and beloved at once.[8]

II

Having described the nature of love, Diotima goes on to define its object (what it is 'of')[9] and its function (*ἔργον*, 206b3). What human beings love, she says, is the good (*οἱ ἄνθρωποι τἀγαθοῦ ἐρῶσιν*, 206a3–4). More precisely, what they love is that the good be in their possession for ever (*ἀεί*, 206a12), which means that love is really of immortality (*ἀθανασίας*, 207a3).[10] Love's *function*, by contrast – what love does – is 'to beget in the beautiful' (*τόκος ἐν καλῷ*, 206b7–8). All humans are 'pregnant' in body and soul, and upon reaching a certain age they desire to beget. This, however, they cannot do 'in' what is ugly, but only 'in' what is beautiful:[11] begetting is possible only when one who is pregnant 'approaches one who is beautiful' (*καλῷ προσπελάζῃ*, 206d3–4), since begetting is something divine and immortal in mortal nature. It follows that Socrates is wrong in thinking that love is of the

[6] She says *love*, but she may be taken to mean *lover* (see 204c1–3, 5): *love* and *lover* go naturally together, the lover being possessed by love and love being that which possesses the lover. It is very difficult to see what leads Brisson [2], 53, to make the claim that 'Éros est par nature merveilleusement beau (210e)' – the exact opposite of what Diotima says (his reference to 210e does not help).

[7] This is what Diotima says, but she may be taken to mean that the lover is not *qua lover* beautiful. She does not mean that a person who is beautiful cannot become a lover.

[8] See below in Section X of this article.

[9] I use the word 'object' where the Greek uses the 'objective' genitive: the object of love is that *οὗ ἐρῶσιν ἄνθρωποι*, 205e7–206a1.

[10] This does not mean that *any* kind of immortality is the object of love, but the kind that consists in the permanent possession of the *good*. This point will be returned to in Section IX of this article.

[11] As is often pointed out, 'in' has a plain meaning where intercourse between a man and a woman is at issue, and a plain if metaphorical meaning where intercourse between a lover and Beauty is at issue. Elsewhere 'in' is not always easy to make sense of, as in the case of the beautiful in which Lycurgus supposedly begets his laws.

beautiful (*οὐ τοῦ καλοῦ ὁ ἔρως ὡς σὺ οἴει*, 206e2–3). Love is not of the beautiful, but of begetting in the beautiful, and it desires to beget because begetting is what endows mortal nature with immortality.

Diotima thus gives a definition of love's object by reference to the good, and a definition of its function by reference to the beautiful, definitions that presuppose a distinction between *good* and *beautiful*. In fact these terms are contrasting terms, since love is of the good, but *not* of the beautiful.[12] At the same time, Diotima's insistence that love is not of the beautiful but of begetting 'in the beautiful' reinforces her earlier point that beauty belongs to the beloved, because the 'beautiful' that the lover begets 'in' *is* his beloved.

Although Diotima does not define the terms *good* and *beautiful* in the way that she defines the object and the function of love, she has already made clear what she means by saying that something is good. She means that it is worth possessing; more specifically she means, at any rate in the present context, that it is worth possessing for its own sake, since she says that its possession constitutes happiness. 'The happy are happy', she says, 'by virtue of possessing what is good',[13] and she adds that there is no need to ask why anyone should wish to be happy (205a1–3), implying that happiness is valued ultimately and for its own sake, not for the sake of something beyond it.

Diotima has not yet made clear what she means by saying that something is *beautiful,* but she will do so later on. Socrates and his companions, she will declare, are ready to go without food and drink simply to gaze upon[14] their beautiful boys and young men (211d4–8), which implies, and is meant to imply, that they find their beautiful boys and young men so pleasing to gaze upon that for the sake of doing so they will go without food and drink. In the same context she asks Socrates what would happen if a man were able to gaze upon divine Beauty itself,[15] this time implying that Beauty is incomparably more pleasing to gaze upon than beautiful boys and young men (211d8–e4).[16]

The distinction between *good* and *beautiful* that is essential to an understanding of Diotima's account of love will be seen later on to be essential to an understanding of Alcibiades' praise of Socrates.

III

When Diotima has defined the object and the function of love, she goes on to consider lovers of different kinds, beginning with non-human animals. When these are desirous of begetting, she says, they become disposed for love, enter into sexual union and subsequently care for their offspring, behaviour that is not difficult to explain given that begetting is the sole means that mortals have of achieving immortality. They achieve it by leaving new creatures behind them in place of the old (*νέον ἀντὶ τοῦ παλαιοῦ*, 207d3).

[12] Diotima's suggestion at 204e1–3 that Socrates substitute 'good' for 'beautiful' has often been taken to imply that the terms *good* and *beautiful* are interchangeable (see n. 5 above). But if this were what Diotima meant, her entire account of love would collapse: see Neumann [22], 38–9 and White [36], 156.

[13] *Κτήσει γάρ, ἔφη, ἀγαθῶν οἱ εὐδαίμονες εὐδαίμονες.*

[14] See *ὁρῶντες*, 211d6; *θεᾶσθαι*, 211d7.

[15] See *ἰδεῖν*, 211e1, *κατιδεῖν*, 211e4; cf. *βλέποντος*, 212a1, *θεωμένου*, 212a2, *ὁρῶντι ᾧ ὁρατόν*, 212a3.

[16] Cf. *Phaedrus* 250b–251a.

Turning to humans, Diotima distinguishes those that are pregnant principally in body from those that are pregnant principally in soul,[17] and she further distinguishes those that are partly initiated from those that are fully initiated in the mysteries of love. Lovers pregnant principally in body, she asserts, turn typically to women, seeking immortality and their happiness, as they believe, through the begetting of children after the flesh. In saying this Diotima makes use of her definitions in a straightforward and literal manner: the object of love in the case of these lovers is the kind of immortality that consists in living on in their children after the flesh, while its function is the begetting of these children in the body of a woman. Diotima does not state explicitly that the woman's body is beautiful, but her definition of the function of love as begetting *in the beautiful* implies it, since it is *in* the woman's body that the children are begotten.[18]

It is natural to infer from Diotima's definitions, although this too she does not state, that a lover of the kind just described will *qua lover* value the beauty of his beloved as a means to achieving his object, but not for its own sake, even if he believes that he does this – thinking perhaps, as Socrates once did (206e2–3), that beauty is the object of love. By contrast, he will value begetting and living on in his offspring for its own sake, since it is this, he believes, that ensures his happiness (εὐδαιμονίαν, 208e4).

Because this point applies to every kind of lover, it will be returned to.

IV

Lovers pregnant principally in soul, Diotima now asserts, are pregnant with what it is fitting for souls to be pregnant with, namely wisdom and the rest of virtue. Poets are examples of this kind, and so are craftsmen of the sort that are genuinely creative.

When a man who is a lover pregnant in soul comes of age, Diotima continues, he desires to beget and bring to birth what he is pregnant with, and looks about for a 'beautiful one' to beget 'in'; and if he comes across such a one, beautiful this time in soul as well as in body,[19] he takes the education of this one in hand, and finds much to say[20] – that is, he begets and gives birth to *external discourses* – concerning virtue and those qualities that characterise a good man. As a result of embracing (ἁπτόμενος, 209c2) the beauty of the one that he thus encounters, this lover begets and gives birth to those things that he has long been pregnant with;[21] and, this done, he shares the rearing of these 'offspring' with his beautiful partner. The object of their love is the permanent possession of the good in the form of the 'offspring' (ἔκγονα, 209d2) that they leave behind them (καταλείπουσιν, 209d3) and live on in, just as parents after the flesh live on in theirs: its function is the begetting of these offspring in a beloved that is beautiful in soul as well as in body.

[17] For a discussion of this, see Pender [27], *passim*.

[18] She may also be taken to imply that *beautiful* in this case is *pleasing to gaze upon*: indeed it is hard to imagine what else she might mean. Lovers of this kind find young women beautiful in much the same way as others find young men beautiful.

[19] The beauty in soul referred to here is not the full beauty of soul that will be seen in Alcibiades' speech to characterise Socrates.

[20] …εὐθὺς εὐπορεῖ λόγων περὶ ἀρετῆς καὶ περὶ οἷον χρὴ εἶναι τὸν ἄνδρα τὸν ἀγαθόν, 209b8–c1.

[21] Neumann [22], 39, describes this as giving birth 'to the beauties of virtue in the other's soul', but this is not what is said.

Given that these lovers are said to leave their offspring behind them, it follows that when Diotima sums up[22] by referring to the many Greeks and non-Greeks who beget *virtue of every kind* (παντοίαν ἀρετήν, 209e2–3), what she is speaking of is not a state of their souls, but the works that they produce and leave behind them. To illustrate the point, Homer's virtue in this context is not his state of soul, but his epic poetry; it is this that wins him immortal glory and renown.[23] The same applies to what Diotima said earlier when she asserted that lovers pregnant in soul are pregnant with wisdom and the rest of virtue, citing poets and craftsmen as examples of these. She meant that these are pregnant with what they will bring forth into the world, works that are external expressions of what lies within them.

The object of these lovers' love is again the permanent possession of the good, so that we may infer, as in the case of lovers of the first kind, that they value this for its own sake as constituting their happiness. The function of their love, also again, is begetting in the beautiful, and we may infer that they do not as lovers value the beautiful for its own sake but merely as that in which to beget. Whether or not they realise this is of no consequence, since Diotima's account of love is not concerned with the lover's conscious intentions, but with the real nature of love and its object.[24]

V

Diotima at length comes to the fully initiated in the rites and revelations of love. For one who is properly guided, she begins, the actions and undertakings relating to love so far described are for the sake of yet higher mysteries, and the path that such a one must follow is this. He must begin with beautiful bodies, first of all loving one particular body and in association with that body begetting *beautiful discourses* (γεννᾶν λόγους καλούς, 210a7–8). Then he must be brought to see that the beauty of one body is akin to that of another, and in seeing this become a lover of all beautiful bodies. Next, he must come to judge beauty of soul to be of greater worth (τιμιώτερον, 210b7)[25] than beauty of body, and as a result of this beget *discourses* (τίκτειν λόγους, 210c1) of a kind likely to make young men better; in attempting which he will in turn be forced to give thought to beautiful customs and ways of living. But he is to be led yet further onwards, from considering ways of living to considering different kinds of knowledge and perceiving their beauty; so that, being now turned towards the entire ocean of beauty,[26] he may beget many *beautiful discourses* (καλοὺς λόγους τίκτῃ, 210d5).

If talk of beauty of body is talk of what is pleasing to gaze upon, as for reasons already given it is, then talk of beauty of soul and forms of knowledge is likewise talk of what is pleasing to gaze upon, though the gazing will not be with bodily eyes. Were

[22] I take Diotima to be generalising when at 209d7–e3 she speaks of the many men, Greeks and non-Greeks, who beget virtue of every kind.

[23] Brisson [2], ad loc., is right, I believe, in translating παντοίαν ἀρετήν by 'des formes variées d'excellence'. Lamb [18], by contrast, gives 'manifold virtues', Hamilton [16] speaks of 'good fruit of all kinds', and Waterfield [35] translates 'virtue in some form or other.'

[24] In this respect it is like Aristophanes' account of love. It would of course have been absurd of Diotima to suggest that all lovers, from non-human animals onwards, beget with the conscious intention of being immortalised through their progeny.

[25] It does not follow that beauty of soul is of greater *intrinsic* worth than beauty of body: Diotima means of greater worth in leading the lover onwards.

[26] For a discussion of this point see Chen [7], 70–3.

it not the same or analogous,[27] the description of the lover's ascent from beauty of body to beauty of soul, to beauty of forms of knowledge and so on, would rest on equivocation and consequently fail of its purpose.

The man who has been properly guided from one kind of beautiful thing to another, Diotima now goes on, is at long last approaching the end of his initiation, and suddenly he catches a glimpse of a reality altogether remarkable for the beauty of its nature, something for the sake of which all previous labours have been undertaken.[28] This reality always 'is', neither becoming nor perishing; it is not beautiful in part, or only at certain times, or in some respects, or merely to some observers. Nor does it present itself as something bodily, or as a form of knowledge, or as belonging to some other thing. Rather, it presents itself as single, eternal, existing by itself, and as that in which all other beautiful things partake.

All of this, says Diotima, is the proper way of being initiated into the mysteries of love, ascending from beautiful bodies to beautiful ways of living, to beautiful forms of knowledge and finally to knowledge of Beauty itself, and it is in this stage of life, if in any, that a man should live, in the contemplation of Beauty. Do you think, she asks Socrates, that the life of a man beholding Beauty and communing with it would be a mean and inferior kind of life? Or do you not upon reflection see that there alone will he be able to beget, not images of virtue, but true virtue (*τίκτειν οὐκ εἴδωλα ἀρετῆς…ἀλλὰ ἀληθῆ*, 212a3–5), because he holds reality in his embrace (*τοῦ ἀληθοῦς ἐφαπτομένῳ*, 212a5); and do you not also see that, having begotten and reared true virtue (*τεκόντι δὲ ἀρετὴν ἀληθῆ καὶ θρεψαμένῳ*, 212a5–6), he deserves to be dear to the gods and to become, he if anyone, immortal?[29]

When Diotima declares that life at the stage in which the true lover beholds and communes with Beauty is the life to live – being, as she says, of no mean and inferior kind – she is usually taken to mean that this life is the lover's ultimate object. But this is not what she means, for she immediately afterwards explains *why* it is the life to live, and her explanation is of a piece with what she has said before. Such a life is the life to live, not because it consists in beholding and communing with Beauty,[30] but because in that life alone the true lover will beget offspring and so attain to immortality.

The offspring that the true lover begets is spoken of as 'true virtue', and by now it should be plain that this true virtue is not a state of the lover's soul,[31] though of course it arises from his soul, any more than the virtue of the many Greeks and

[27] *Pace* Nussbaum [23], 180–1, there can be no objection to the use of the word 'same' here, but 'analogous' may be preferred where 'analogous' means 'similar' in the sense that we all presuppose when speaking, quite correctly, of beautiful mathematical proofs as readily as of beautiful sunsets.

[28] It is important to note that the ascent is not an easy one, for which reason Socrates singles out courage (*δύναμιν καὶ ἀνδρείαν*, 212b7–8) as a noteworthy characteristic of love, just as Alcibiades singles courage out as a noteworthy characteristic of Socrates himself.

[29] When Diotima uses the word *ὑπάρχει*, I take her to mean that the true lover *deserves* to become immortal (as well as dear to the gods), not merely that he is more likely to. The latter would be an implausible claim, given that tyrants are as likely to live on in the record of their deeds as the true lover in the record of his discourses.

[30] Brisson [2], ad loc., translates '… la vie vaut d'être vécue, *parce qu'il contemple* la beauté en elle-même', but *parce qu'il contemple* is unwarranted as a translation (in this context) of *θεωμένῳ* (211d2).

[31] *Pace* many commentators: e.g. Hackforth [14], 45; Bluck [1], 29, n. 1; Waterfield [35], xxxix; Pender [27], 85; and more recently Chang [6], 433, 435, 436. Curiously, many commentators are silent on the issue; even Brisson [2], who up to this point has 485 footnotes on other topics.

non-Greeks spoken of earlier is a state of their souls. It consists in discourses.[32] Diotima has repeatedly declared that the offspring of lovers pregnant in soul are discourses, discourses of a kind to make men better,[33] and given that the true lover is himself one who is pregnant in soul, what he begets will also be discourses. Further, the true lover is the philosopher, in fact he is Socrates,[34] and Socrates is pre-eminently the one who devotes his life to discourses of a kind to make men better, urging them to take care of their souls.[35]

Everything now falls into place. The object of the true lover's love is immortality in the form of living on in his offspring,[36] and his offspring are his discourses, like the offspring of all lovers pregnant principally in soul. The function of his love, again like that of others, is the begetting of offspring 'in the beautiful', this time 'the beautiful' being Beauty itself. The true lover, as has been seen, communes with Beauty (*συνόντος αὐτῷ*, 212a2), holds it in his embrace (*ἐφαπτομένῳ*, 212a4), and in union with it begets (*τίκτειν*, 212a3) true virtue, just as every other lover pregnant in soul communes with and embraces his beautiful one (*ἁπτόμενος…τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ ὁμιλῶν αὐτῷ*, 209c2–3), in union with whom he begets virtue of every kind (*παντοίαν ἀρετήν*, 209e2–3). It follows finally that the true lover, like all others, will *qua lover* value the object of his love, his immortality and happiness, for its own sake, but communion with Beauty for the part that it plays in enabling him to achieve that object.[37]

It will be useful at this stage to draw together the principal points made concerning love. The object of love is the permanent possession of the good, which is achieved by living on in offspring begotten 'in the beautiful' – *good* and *beautiful* being different attributes. Given that the permanent possession of the good is what constitutes happiness, the lover seeks this for its own sake, while seeking the beautiful as that in which to beget. The permanent good sought by the true lover is the immortality that consists in living on in his philosophical discourses – his 'true virtue' – which he begets in Beauty itself.

The importance of these points for an understanding of Alcibiades' speech will shortly emerge.

VI

Socrates concludes his speech by declaring that he is persuaded of Diotima's teaching, and that because of this he devotes himself to love and exhorts others to do

[32] They are 'true' in virtue of being expressions of *knowledge* as opposed to true belief: see White [37], 376–7.

[33] See 209b7–c1; 210a7–8; 210c1–3; 210d4–6.

[34] On the point that the true lover is the philosopher and that he is Socrates in particular, see White [37], 375.

[35] See e. g. *Apology* 29d–e, 30a–b, 30d–31b, 36c, 38a.

[36] This is contrary to the view of most scholars who consider the immortality that Diotima speaks of to be personal immortality. To take a few examples: Cornford [8], 127, Bluck [1], 28 n. 1; and, more recently, Pender [27], 85 and Waterfield [35], xxxiii.

[37] It does not follow, however, that Beauty is not from another point of view to be valued for its own sake; it follows merely that the true lover *qua* lover will not value it as such. Diotima's own description of Beauty makes plain that it is a reality to be valued for its own sake, and we know from the *Phaedo*, written close in time to the *Symposium*, that Socrates places Beauty (*καλὸν <αὐτό>*, 65d7) among the beings that the philosopher longs to gaze upon as effecting his only true fulfilment (66b6–7, 66e3), beings that are pure, everlasting, immortal, constant and unchanging (79d2), like Beauty in the *Symposium*.

likewise (212b6–7). This declaration is followed by the entry of Alcibiades, who shortly afterwards contributes a speech in praise, not of love, but of Socrates: he will praise no one else, he says, when Socrates is present (214d7–8). However, on the assumption that Plato means us to see Socrates as the true lover, we may take Alcibiades' speech to be in praise of love after all, and to be a continuation of what has gone before. Further, since Plato has Socrates urge Alcibiades to speak the truth and has Alcibiades beg to be interrupted if he does not speak the truth (214e7–11), we may take the substance of Alcibiades' speech to be an expression of Plato's own beliefs.[38]

Alcibiades' praise of Socrates has two distinct though closely related objects,[39] Socrates himself and his discourses (*καὶ αὐτὸς καὶ οἱ λόγοι αὐτοῦ*, 221d2), neither of which, he declares, has its equal among men past or present (221d3–5).[40] What, in a word or two, he means when he says that Socrates himself has no equal is that Socrates' soul is all-beautiful. While Alcibiades is beautiful in body, a matter of notorious pride to himself (217a5–6, 219c5), Socrates has the bodily appearance of a satyr and is equally rough in manner (215b4–8). But Socrates is all-beautiful within: his inner states are 'divine, glorious and all-beautiful' (*θεῖα καὶ χρυσᾶ καὶ πάγκαλα*, 216e7–217a1),[41] while his inconceivable beauty of soul (*ἀμήχανον κάλλος*, 218e2)[42] contrasts in every way with Alcibiades' beauty of body (*τῆς παρὰ σοὶ εὐμορφίας πάμπολυ διαφέρον*, 218e2–3). If Alcibiades were able to exchange his bodily beauty for Socrates' beauty of soul, he would indeed have the better of the bargain (218e3–219a1), because Socrates' beauty is real, while that of Alcibiades is but apparent (*ἀντὶ δόξης ἀλήθειαν καλῶν*, 218e6). Consequently Socrates despises Alcibiades' beauty, as he does the bodily beauty of others (216d7–e1, 219c4–5, 222a7–b3), his pursuit of young men beautiful in body being an ironic pose (213c4–5, 216d2–3, 223a7).

Alcibiades is not altogether without merit of soul, as he himself proclaims (*ψυχῆς μὴ ἀφυοῦς*, 218a6), and he has at least some desire for true excellence (218d1–2). But he has grievous shortcomings and neglects himself (*πολλοῦ ἐνδεὴς ὢν αὐτὸς ἔτι ἐμαυτοῦ μὲν ἀμελῶ*, 216a5–6). He is intemperate, as is evident from his present demeanour and drinking as well as from his one-time behaviour towards Socrates, and he lacks the kind of courage and staying-power needed to achieve the excellence that he desires. He knows that the life urged upon him by Socrates is the life that he ought to lead, and he even listens to Socrates for a while. But he then turns away, neglecting his soul and giving himself up to the adulation of the crowd (216a5–b5).

In short, Socrates is beautiful in soul, not in body: Alcibiades is beautiful in body, not in soul.

[38] Cf. Brisson [2], 52: 'Dans ce discours si "écrit", transparaissent en filigrane, me semble-t-il, les sentiments, profonds et puissants, qu'a dû éprouver Platon à l'égard d'un Socrate qui semble être resté pour lui une énigme fascinante.'

[39] It is because Socrates is beautiful in soul that he gives forth beautiful discourses, just as in the *Gorgias* it is because the good man is good that he speaks with a view to what is good for those that hear him (*Gorgias* 503d6–7).

[40] The point in which Socrates and his discourses are said to be without equal is, narrowly speaking, their respective contrasts between exterior and interior, but from the detail of what Alcibiades says it is clear that it is the respective 'interiors' that really matter.

[41] Strictly speaking it is *images* that are divine and so on, but this is no more than a part of Alcibiades' extended comparison. The Silenus-figures are divine within in the sense of containing images of gods, but Socrates himself is really 'divine'.

[42] The scope of Socrates' irony is not intended by Plato to include Socrates' own beauty of soul. He has already made it clear that Socrates is all-beautiful within (217a1).

VII

According to most scholars, the ultimate achievement and glory of the true lover, and therefore of Socrates, is his communion with Beauty;[43] but, if this view is correct, it is difficult to explain why Plato does not make Alcibiades dwell on communion with Beauty. It is often said that this is because Alcibiades is not present during Socrates' speech and so cannot plausibly be made to refer to the true lover's communion with Beauty, but this is not persuasive. Plato could easily have used words understood by his readers, but not by the dramatic Alcibiades, to refer to communion with Beauty.[44]

If the view presented in this article is correct, no difficulty arises. For, on this view, communion with Beauty is not the ultimate achievement and glory of the true lover, but the means through which he achieves the object of his love. Consequently, Plato has no urgent reason to make Alcibiades allude to it, and none at all for making him dwell on it. But more may be said. Alcibiades' eloquence on Socrates' beauty of soul taken in conjunction with his silence on communion with Beauty may be taken as evidence that Plato the writer of the dialogue judges beauty of soul to be of greater importance than communion with Beauty – Alcibiades' eloquence and silence being Plato's own.

Although this observation is independent of what is meant by 'beauty of soul', this is worth considering, however briefly, in its own right.

VIII

In addition to being praised for his beauty of soul, Socrates is praised for his goodness, especially for his temperance and courage (*σωφροσύνην, ἀνδρείαν, καρτερίαν*, 216d7, 219d5–7, 220a1).[45] These, we learn, he possesses to a pre-eminent degree, being fearless and steadfast in danger (221b4–6), superhumanly indifferent to

[43] To mention just a few: Bury [5], xliv, xlix; Chen [7], 66; Cornford [8], 122; Grote [11], 18; Grube [12], 105; Hamilton [16], 17; Irwin [17], 165; Lamb [18], 76–7; Levy [19], 286; Nygren [24], 174, 177, 179; Plotinus [28], I, 6, 8–9; Raven [29], 107; Rowe [31], 43; Stannard [32], 121, 129; Taylor [33], 225, 231–2; Teloh [34], 96. Most recently, Brisson [2], 73, has it that: 'dans le *Banquet*…ce qui fait que la vie mérite d'être vécue, c'est la possibilité de contempler les Formes'. For the view taken in this article, see Waterfield [35], xxxiv together with notes to 206, and White [37], 370–3.

[44] Everything in Alcibiades' 'improvised' speech is carefully weighed by Plato in what Brisson [2], 52, aptly describes as 'un texte finement ciselé', and, given that Alcibiades was so close to Socrates, and that at the dramatic date of the dialogue he was already some thirty or more years old, he could (and perhaps should) be taken to be familiar with Socrates' thought. In fact, his description of Socrates when deep in thought at Potidaea (220c–d) is often taken to be a reference to Socrates' communion with Beauty (see e.g. Burnet [4], 113, Robin [30], cvi, and Taylor [33], 232–3). But, if it is, it is ambiguous, so ambiguous in fact that it appears to others to be no such reference at all (see e.g. Hackforth [15], 14–16). If Plato had considered communion with Beauty to be the highest achievement of the true lover, he would surely have made unmistakable references to it.

[45] Wisdom is mentioned (*φρόνησιν*, 219d6) but given no great prominence, and justice is not mentioned at all. If my comparison with the *Phaedo* is right, this is not because Alcibiades wishes to imply that Socrates is unjust (*pace* Duncan [10], 287), or to imply that he considers Socrates' wisdom to be relatively unimportant. It is because Plato (through Alcibiades) wishes to stress the virtues of temperance and courage. In the *Phaedo* Socrates does mention justice, but merely slips it in: he does not discuss it, and it plays no part in his argument. He also mentions wisdom, but as a *process* of purification (*καθαρμός*, 69c2–3) resulting in a *state* of purity (*κάθαρσις*, 69c1). (On this last point see e.g. Burnet [3], n. ad loc.; Loriaux [20], 107.) This is not to say that wisdom is unimportant as the process of purification: Dixsaut [9], 335, states its role exactly when she says:

physical hardship (220a6–c1), and even beyond the influence of drink (214a4–5, 220a4–5).

We have no reason to think that Plato considers this goodness to be identical with Socrates' beauty of soul, because in developing Diotima's account of love he makes an unmistakable distinction between *good* and *beautiful*, as was emphasised earlier, and we have no grounds for thinking that he wishes to abandon that distinction now.[46] However, on the assumption that Socrates' goodness is not identical with his beauty of soul, it is still natural to suppose that Plato believes the two to be intimately related, and the prominence that he gives to Socrates' temperance and courage suggests in what way they are related. For temperance and courage are given the same prominence in the *Phaedo*, the dialogue written closest in time to the *Symposium*.[47]

According to Plato in the *Phaedo*, temperance and courage are the same thing as purity of soul (κάθαρσις), the same thing, that is, as freedom from the fears, desires and other ills of the body;[48] and, if this view is taken of Socrates' temperance and courage as described in the *Symposium*, these will be Socrates' purity of soul, achieved by him in his ascent to the vision of Beauty, an ascent demanding the greatest possible freedom from the concerns of the body. At the same time, Plato believes purity and beauty of soul to be inseparable.[49] As he says in the *Republic*:

> to understand the soul's true nature we must look at it, not as we see it now, marred by its association with the body and other ills, but carefully contemplating it with the aid of reasoning in order to see what it is like in its pure state. It will then be discovered to be a thing of far greater beauty … (611b10–c4).

In the light of this, Socrates' virtue as described in the *Symposium* is his purity of soul, the state in which his soul's natural beauty is unsullied by its association with his body.[50]

To sum up on the praise of Socrates so far. Socrates the true lover possesses great beauty of soul, and this, not his communion with Beauty, is the first respect in which he is without equal among men. He also possesses great goodness of soul, and this is nothing other than the freedom of his soul and its natural beauty from bodily taint.

'Elle constitue le seul moyen d'acquérir…les vertus réelles…parce qu'elle purifie l'âme de ses fausses peurs, faux plaisirs, fausses peines: de ses opinions erronées concernant la nature du dangereux, de l'agréable, du pénible.'

[46] Quite the reverse, since not only is Alcibiades' beauty of the same kind as that of the young men said by Diotima to be eagerly gazed upon by Socrates and others, but Alcibiades was one of those young men. At the same time, as in the case of Diotima's account of love, the word 'beautiful' has the same sense when applied to the soul as when applied to the body; otherwise the contrast between beauty of body and beauty of soul gets no purchase.

[47] While I believe that the *Phaedo* was written before the *Symposium*, nothing hangs on this here. For a recent defence of the opposite view, see Dixsaut [9], 26–7. (I do not find her argument from 'dialectique ascendante' persuasive, given Socrates' exchange with Agathon and his remarks at 201e2–7 on his initial exchange with Diotima.)

[48] In the *Phaedo* the philosopher must achieve freedom from the body in order to apprehend reality (see esp. 66b1–67b1) and that freedom is constituted by courage and temperance, both of which are forms of purification (κάθαρσις) manifested in a high degree of indifference to the pleasures, pains, fears and desires of the body. Correspondingly, in the *Symposium* the true lover must achieve freedom from the body, or from those experiences of the soul that are most associated with the body, in order to apprehend true reality (τοῦ ἀληθοῦς ἐφαπτομένῳ, 212a5).

[49] See, for example, *Phaedo* 109d–110c; *Sophist* 230e; *Philebus* 53b.

[50] Cf. *Phaedrus* 250c.

IX

To turn now to the second respect in which Socrates is without equal, his discourses. It is not surprising that these receive close attention, since they are, as was argued earlier, what the true lover begets and lives on in. However, the language in which they are described is worthy of note. Like Socrates himself, they are said to be outwardly unattractive: full of absurd words and phrases and as rough as the hide of a satyr (221e3–4). But within they are the only discourses that contain any sense (*νοῦν*, 222a2): they are utterly divine (*θειοτάτους*, 222a3), contain many images of virtue (*ἀγάλματ' ἀρετῆς*, 222a4), and cover everything that a man needs to give thought to if he would be 'beautiful and good' (*τῷ μέλλοντι καλῷ κἀγαθῷ ἔσεσθαι*, 222a6).[51]

Alcibiades does not say that Socrates' discourses are beautiful, but we know that they are, because Diotima more than once describes the discourses of those lovers who are in the final stage of initiation as beautiful (210a7–8, d5), and Socrates is one of those lovers. That Alcibiades considers them to be beautiful is evident anyway, from the comparison that he draws between them and Socrates who is unattractive without but all-beautiful within, and from his description of their effects on others. Women, men and youngsters, all alike are entranced by them (215d5–6), while at the sound of them Alcibiades' heart leaps up and his tears gush forth, experiences of a kind felt by others too (215e2–4).[52] Moreover, they are as enchanting and entrancing as the <beautiful>[53] music of Marsyas and Olympus (215c1–d1) or the voices of the Sirens (216a6–8).[54]

Given that Socrates is the true lover, his beautiful discourses are the offspring that ensure his immortality. But nothing is said of this immortality, even though Plato could have had Alcibiades speak of it, as of communion with Beauty, in words intelligible to his readers. His silence then is at first blush surprising, particularly in the light of Diotima's declaration that immortality is the lover's sole object. But there is a good reason for this silence. Immortality in the sense of living on in one's offspring is of little worth in itself, since many a villain lives on in the record of his crimes. Whenever living on is deserving of praise, therefore, this will be due to the merits of the offspring themselves, and Alcibiades' speech serves to bring this out. Plato uses it in effect to say that it is Socrates' discourses, not Socrates himself, that deserve to live on in the memories of others, and this is a view that Socrates himself would have applauded. It is clear from his indifference to military honours (220e5–7),

[51] Given that it occurs within the context of Alcibiades' speech, it is natural to assume that 'beautiful and good' here means 'beautiful within' in the way that Socrates is beautiful within, since it is natural to assume that Socrates wishes to make others beautiful within as he is himself – in contrast, on the one hand, to his rough exterior, and, on the other hand, to Alcibiades' beauty of body. This construal of 'beautiful and good' receives support from what is said in the *Charmides* (153d2–e3), where bodily beauty is contrasted with beauty of soul, and one who is beautiful in soul is explicitly characterised as 'beautiful and good' (*καλὸς καὶ ἀγαθός*, 154e4). We know too from the *Republic* that one who possesses virtue possesses beauty of soul (444d13–e1).

[52] In the case of sight, what is beautiful is what is pleasing to gaze upon with the eyes of the body or of the soul. In the case of sound (especially of music) what is beautiful is still pleasing to gaze upon in the sense of 'perceive', but it is often more intensely moving.

[53] It seems evident that beauty is the point of the comparison made by Alcibiades.

[54] Just as Socrates' inner beauty of soul is related to virtue, being in some sense its consequence, so the inner beauty of his discourses is related to virtue. Not only are they begotten of one who is incomparably good – temperate, courageous and wise – but they contain everything needed to move others to become good and consequently beautiful within.

that being recognised by others meant nothing to him, but he would undoubtedly have wanted his discourses to go on urging others to take care of their souls. As indeed they do.

X

Although Socrates is certainly to be seen as the true lover, Alcibiades describes him as all-beautiful, wise and good (217a1, 219d5–7), and in doing this he assigns him the very qualities that according to Diotima belong to the beloved and not to the lover (201e6–204c6). Further, Alcibiades, who himself behaves towards Socrates as a lover (217e1–219d2),[55] explicitly declares that Socrates exchanges roles with those whose lover he pretends to be, and becomes instead their beloved (222b3–4).

This cannot have been unintended, and what Plato has in mind is this. As one who is fully initiated, Socrates is the true lover, but in the very process of being initiated he transcends the bodily, and so attains to purity and beauty of soul. He is consequently lover and beloved at once, begetting beautiful discourses and inducing others to do likewise.[56]

To conclude. On the traditional interpretation of the *Symposium*, an interpretation that gives most weight to the words of Diotima, the splendour of Socrates the true lover lies in his communion with Beauty: he is before all else a 'mystic' whose ascent to Beauty may be compared to the spiritual voyage described by a John of the Cross.[57] On the interpretation argued for in this article, an interpretation that allows full weight to the words of Alcibiades, although Socrates the lover and beloved has undoubtedly attained to communion with Beauty, his splendour lies elsewhere – in his beauty of soul and speech.[58]

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[55] When Alcibiades ends his speech, there is laughter at his frankness, 'which seemed to show that he was still in love with Socrates' (*ὅτι ἐδόκει ἔτι ἐρωτικῶς ἔχειν τοῦ Σωκράτους*, 222c2–3).

[56] Among them Plato himself.

[57] See Taylor [33], 225: cf. Hamilton [16], 26–7.

[58] I am grateful to Dr E.E. Sleinis for many hours of discussion.

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