

VII.—The Rôle of Eryximachus in Plato's *Symposium*

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The intention of this paper is to show that Plato's representation of Eryximachus is not a caricature of the physician; that Eryximachus plays an important rôle in the framework of the dialogue and that there is a relationship between the position given to him and the contents of the *Symposium*.

Among the speakers at the banquet that brought together Agathon, Socrates and Alcibiades (172A–B), Eryximachus is the representative of the medical art. There is almost general agreement among modern interpreters that Plato, in representing him, has drawn an ironical portrait of the pedantic expert and scientist. When once it was claimed that "nowhere in literature do we have such a charming picture illustrating the position of the cultivated physician in society as that given in Plato's Dialogues of Eryximachus," Gildersleeve retorted that Eryximachus was a pedant, a system-monger "who was only on sufferance in that brilliant company and whom Plato holds up to ridicule as incorporating the worst foibles of the professor of the healing art."<sup>1</sup> Most other criticisms have been in more or less the same vein.

This common verdict on Eryximachus is not restricted to details of Plato's portrayal. Wherever he appears on the stage, it is claimed, he is ridiculed as a pedant.<sup>2</sup> Even before he contributes his share to the contest of speeches on Eros, he is said to show his pedantry. Unable to forget his professional solemnity, he seizes every opportunity to display his medical knowledge: when he is first mentioned, he immediately delivers a lecture on μέθη (176C–D); later on he discourses on λύγξ (185D–E).<sup>3</sup> This censure is hardly justified. Eryximachus' first intervention is due to Pausanias' complaint that he is still weak from yesterday's bout and to his

<sup>1</sup> *AJPh* 30 (1909) 109. The statement is made in answer to W. Osler, *Counsels and Ideals* (Boston and New York, 1905) 24.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. U. v. Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Platon* I (3rd edition [Berlin, 1929]) 367: "Der Sprecher . . . soll unfreiwillig komisch wirken, wo immer er auftritt . . ."; cf. *ibid.* 361: "Der Arzt hat hier die Rolle des Pedanten."

<sup>3</sup> Cf. R. G. Bury, *The Symposium of Plato* (Cambridge, 1909) xxviii; A. Hug and H. Schöne, *Symposion* (*Platons Ausgewählte Schriften* 5 [3rd edition, Leipzig and Berlin, 1909]) xxxviii and 61, note 3.

request that the company consider how one could make today's drinking easy (176A). After Aristophanes has supported this wish for ease in drinking (176B) Eryximachus takes the platform. He inquires whether Agathon too finds himself not exactly in "good condition," and since this is admitted, and the other guests are not great drinkers anyhow (176B-C), he proceeds to state that excess in drinking is harmful and that he would advise against it, especially for those who are still somewhat heavy-headed (176D).<sup>4</sup> Advice has been sought, and who should be better prepared to give counsel than the physician who can rely on his medical experience? Does not the question asked clearly concern medicine?<sup>5</sup> Again, in proposing a cure for hiccoughs (185D-E), Eryximachus does not intrude on the company with his medical lore. It is not he who has brought up the subject. Aristophanes has turned to him because he thinks that the physician is the man to tell him how to stop his hiccoughs; Eryximachus only gives the advice for which he has been consulted. By making Eryximachus act as a physician whenever the occasion calls for medical opinion, Plato can hardly have intended to satirize him.

But even in his speech on Eros, Eryximachus talks as a physician. To this ancestor of Molière's Diafoirus, Robin claims,<sup>6</sup> everything in the world appears within the infinitely enlarged compass of his art. His oration is marred by pedantic mannerisms: "If Eryximachos is allowed to take up his parable," Gildersleeve contends,<sup>7</sup> "it is because Plato wished to let his humor play on the weak sides of the profession."

There is no gainsaying the assertion that Eryximachus loves to

<sup>4</sup> Eryximachus is not cut short by Phaedrus, as Hug-Schöne (see note 3) 21, note 2, maintain. He gives his counsel and has said all that he intended to say when he has finished.

<sup>5</sup> This is acknowledged in Phaedrus' words: ἀττ' ἂν περὶ ἱατρικῆς λέγῃς (176D). Physicians of the fourth century, not only philosophers like Antisthenes and Aristotle (cf. Hug-Schöne [see note 3] xxxviii, note 8), wrote on drunkenness and symposia; e.g. Mnesitheus (Athenaeus 11, p. 483f = Fr. 45 [H. Hohenstein, *Der Arzt Mnesitheus aus Athen*, Diss. Berlin, 1935]) and, in later times, Heraclides of Tarentum, Fr. 24 (K. Deichgräber, *Die griechische Empirikerschule* [Berlin, 1930]). Discussions of the influence of wine on men's health are also to be found in Hippocrates and Diocles; cf. Diocles, Fr. 141 (M. Wellmann, *Die Fragmente der sikelischen Ärzte* [Berlin, 1901]), and the parallels there given. Diocles recommends drinking πρὸς ἡδονήν (182, 1.2). The same expression is used in the *Symposium* (176E).

<sup>6</sup> L. Robin, *Le Banquet* (Platon, *Oeuvres Complètes*, 4.2 [Paris, 1929] Collection Budé) LII.

<sup>7</sup> *AJPh* 30 (1909) 109.

speak of medicine. Indeed, he begins his discourse with a dissertation on the medical art in order to pay homage to his profession, as he himself adds (186B). This, however, is not a sign of conceit on the part of the artisan; it simply shows a natural respect for his calling. Agathon too puts his art first, and in honoring poetry in this way, he expressly refers to the example of Eryximachus (196D).<sup>8</sup> Nor does Eryximachus give undue attention to his specialty. His analysis of medicine (186B-E) is shorter than his analysis of music (187A-E). To be sure, after having proved that Eros holds sway over medicine, he comes back to his art twice in order to elucidate certain points by comparison (187C; E), and once he speaks of health and disease when discussing the influence of Eros on the seasons of the year (188A-B). Such references, like the diction of his speech, clearly denote him as a medical man.<sup>9</sup> But after all, Eryximachus is a physician, and Plato apparently is interested in bringing out the typical characteristics of each speaker as well as the individual features of their personalities. Thus, in the speeches of Aristophanes and Agathon he uses motifs and stylistic devices that indicate the vocation of the two poets.<sup>10</sup> Aristophanes is pictured as "the very genius of the old comedy." He is "ready to laugh and make laugh before he opens his mouth, just as Socrates, true to his character, is ready to argue before he begins to speak."<sup>11</sup> The fact that Eryximachus talks like a physician, therefore, does

<sup>8</sup> Robin (see note 6) 24, note 2, concludes from the fact that Eryximachus discusses medicine first that for him it is *the art*. This judgment, in my opinion, is not justified because it does not take account of the motivation adduced by Plato. For another statement of Eryximachus that might be construed in Robin's sense, cf. below p. 89.

<sup>9</sup> A. E. Taylor, *Plato* (New York, 1936) 217, rightly says: "The style of the speech is appropriately sober, free from the artifices of rhetoric and marked by a plentiful use of professional terminology." Bury (see note 3) xxix notes the plainness of the oration and its lack of ornament but adds that its monotony (the recurrence of the same formulae) "marks it as the product of a pedantic, would-be scientific mind in which literary taste is but slightly developed and the ruling interest is the schematization of physical doctrines." Were such an evaluation made universal, many a great scientist, I am afraid, and even many a Greek scientist, would have to be classified as a pedant. P. Friedländer, *Platon 2* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1930) 304, suggests that by emphasizing the pedantry of the arrangement Plato satirizes the style of certain Hippocratic writings. Could he not simply have imitated this style in order to give to Eryximachus' words their native color?

<sup>10</sup> For Aristophanes, cf. Bury (see note 3) xxx; Friedländer (see note 9) 306 ff.; for Agathon, cf. Bury xxxvi; B. Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato 1* (3rd edition [New York and London, 1892]) 531.

<sup>11</sup> Jowett (see note 10) 530.

not yet make him a pedant, and to those who interpret his medical air as a caricature of the expert, Eryximachus might well answer, as Aristophanes answered the physician when he blamed the comic poet for his buffoonery: I am not afraid to speak in this manner, for this is "the custom of my Muse" (189B).

On the other hand, if Eryximachus is reproached for "the dogmatism of his profession in trying to make good his pedantic correction of his predecessors,"<sup>12</sup> one should point out that the other speakers are dogmatic too. All of them give their opinions for what they are worth.<sup>13</sup> Besides, he is not the only one to detect the shortcomings of his rivals. Pausanias is dissatisfied with the speech of Phaedrus (180c); Aristophanes criticizes Eryximachus and Pausanias (189c); Agathon believes that his method of praising Eros is the correct one, while that of all the previous speakers was bad (194E); and Socrates charges that nobody so far has told the truth (198D). Moreover, if Eryximachus' argumentation seems a nuance too pedantic, this didacticism may have been intentional and meant to amuse himself and the rest of the company. The banquet is not a solemn affair. Those who are present are determined to have their fun; they indulge in jests and merrymaking, Aristophanes no more than Socrates and all the others.<sup>14</sup> At any rate, Eryximachus is quite capable of rising to the occasion. He defines medicine as the knowledge of separating fair love from foul (186c); he holds that Eros is the god who guides the work of the farmer and of the trainer (186E). Such ideas are fanciful and whimsical. He would certainly not have chosen the same language when conversing with his patients or with a peasant or a trainer. But for a party dedicated to the celebration of Eros his words are quite appropriate and give to his performance the mixture of the playful and the serious of which Agathon boasts in regard to his own oration (197E) and which is characteristic of all the speeches that are delivered.<sup>15</sup> Finally, that Eryximachus' professional atti-

<sup>12</sup> Gildersleeve (see note 1) 109; Friedländer (see note 9) 304, speaks of "Eitelkeit des Fachmanns" and "unliebenswürdige Krittelsucht."

<sup>13</sup> Cf. below p. 101.

<sup>14</sup> Taylor (see note 9) 217, was the first to suggest that Eryximachus' pedantry is "part of the fun of the evening and is presumably intentional." The gay tone of certain sections of the *Symposium*, the interplay of humor and seriousness, hardly need elaboration. Whether it is appropriate to contrast the *Symposium* as a comedy with the *Phaedo* as a tragedy (cf. Wilamowitz [see note 2] 356), is quite a different problem.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Jowett (see note 10) 526.

tude and seriousness are tempered by a sense of humor is obvious also in his altercation with Aristophanes (189A–B). The poet is well aware of the physician's sarcasm when he answers him laughingly, and it is not for nothing that in his speech he guards himself repeatedly against any mocking remarks of Eryximachus (193B; D). Nor could Eryximachus have enjoyed the comic masterpiece of Aristophanes as much as he did (193E), had he himself lacked a sense of humor.<sup>16</sup>

Yet at this point one might object: even granted that the speech of Eryximachus is to some extent shaped by Plato's wish to characterize him as a doctor, that Eryximachus is not altogether portrayed as a pedantic fool, why is he made to claim that all he knows and all he is going to propound he has learned from medicine (186A–B)? How can medicine have taught him that Eros rules not only men and animals and plants, but all things, human and divine alike?<sup>17</sup> This assertion, it seems, indicates a rather ludicrous pride in the importance of the medical art and stamps Eryximachus as the prototype of the arrogant doctor. The speech as a whole, if not every detail of it, appears to be a travesty of the narrow-mindedness and conceit of the physician.<sup>18</sup>

It is true that Eryximachus' contention, at first blush, sounds preposterous. Yet before condemning him altogether it is perhaps pertinent to ask what exactly he has learned from medicine, what his art has led him to observe in regard to all the subjects which he mentions.<sup>19</sup> To put it briefly, it is this: the principle of a double

<sup>16</sup> Hug-Schöne (see note 3) xxxviii and 61, note 3, seem the only ones to allow Eryximachus "einen gewissen trockenen ärztlichen Humor."

<sup>17</sup> F. A. Wolf proposed to change the usual punctuation and to take the words *ὡς μέγας κτλ* as an independent sentence: nam ad *omnia* pertinere amorem, ad divinas etiam res ex arte medica discere non potuit (cf. G. F. Rettig, *Platons Symposium* 2 [Halle, 1876] 164). But such a change would be of no avail since the preceding *ὅτι* clause makes the same sweeping assumption. For the grammatical structure of the sentence, cf. Hug-Schöne (see note 3) 63, note 8.

<sup>18</sup> The statement made in 186A has been taken by K. F. Hermann (*Geschichte u. System der platonischen Philosophie* 1 [Heidelberg, 1839] 215) to show the pedantic self-complacency and glibness of the sophist; cf. also A. Schwegler, *Über die Composition des Platonischen Symposions* (Tübingen, 1843) 33. More recent interpreters are usually satisfied with pointing out that to Eryximachus medicine is the source of all knowledge (Hug-Schöne [see note 3] 63, note 7), and they parallel the assertion made here with that made in 176b. But the assumption that Eryximachus should have acquired from medicine a knowledge of all things human and divine is certainly a more far-reaching proposition than that medicine should have taught him a cure for hiccoughs.

<sup>19</sup> Thus, I think, one should best translate *καθεωρακέναι μοι δοκῶ ἐκ τῆς ἰατρικῆς*. The expression seems singular. Usually Plato says *καθορᾶν ἐν* (cf. F. Ast, *Lexicon*

Eros is valid in medicine, husbandry, gymnastics, music, astronomy and divination. Eryximachus' speech displays a familiarity with the basic presuppositions of the various arts, crafts and sciences.<sup>20</sup> Such knowledge, in my opinion, one should expect of a physician of the fifth century B.C., and Eryximachus may easily have acquired it in his pursuit of medicine.

In Eryximachus' time the value and nature of the arts were widely disputed. Many people asserted that the artisan did not accomplish anything through his art, that his success or failure depended entirely on chance. They went even so far as to deny that there was such a thing as an art; the word, they claimed, was an empty phrase behind which to hide one's ignorance and incompetence. To these attacks the artisans were forced to reply. By a careful analysis of the rules of the various arts they tried to establish the reality of their achievements which they contended were the results of insight and true understanding. Wherever men gathered to talk about problems important to them individually, or to the community as a whole, one professional after another would defend his art and define the nature of his technique. The physician naturally was among those who participated in these debates. The Hippocratic writing *On the Art* reflects the atmosphere in which such discussions took place.<sup>21</sup> Here a physician speaks in behalf of medicine. He quotes the objections of the adversaries and refutes them word by word. He points to the difficulties of the other arts, to the parallelism between the physician's procedure and that of other artisans. He is apparently well

*Platonicum* 2 [Leipzig, 1836]) s.v. Such phrases as καθορῶντες ὑψόθεν (*Sophistes* 216c) perhaps suggest that the words in question mean: looking out from medicine I have observed. . . .

<sup>20</sup> It has often been noticed that Eryximachus is preoccupied with the τέχραι. Cf. especially L. v. Sybel, *Platon's Symposion* (Marburg, 1888) 26 ff.; Bury (see note 3) xxix: "definitions of a precisely parallel kind for each of these departments [sc. of science] are evolved." Since these arts are concerned with all things human and divine, Eryximachus' talk assumes a cosmological aspect, but this tinge of natural philosophy is only incidental. In my opinion, he does not talk as a "Naturforscher," as has sometimes been held (e.g. Friedländer [see note 9] 305). The evaluation of Robin (see note 6) LII, note 1, seems more appropriate: "La technicité le préoccupe beaucoup plus que la cosmologie." The peculiarity of Eryximachus' approach is the more noteworthy since he was versed in natural philosophy, cf. below p. 93.

<sup>21</sup> *Hippocratis Opera*, ed. J. L. Heiberg, *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum* 1.1 (Leipzig and Berlin, 1927) 9 ff. This treatise gives the most vivid and most comprehensive picture of the problems debated, which are referred to also in the fragments of the Pre-Socratics and in the Platonic dialogues. In general, cf. also P. Shorey, *TAPhA* 40 (1909) 185 ff.; J. Wild, *Plato's Theory of Man* (Cambridge, 1946) 45 ff.

versed in their problems, and he also knows as much philosophy as is needed to provide a more general foundation for his statements.<sup>22</sup>

Eryximachus, then, must have been familiar with the methods and theories not only of medicine but also of the arts in general. The relationship of his profession to gymnastics and husbandry and music must have been a matter of interest to him. The subject which he chooses as his topic at the banquet, the way in which he approaches it, even his contention that medicine led him to observe the facts which he is about to recount, all these features characterize him as a physician of the classical period. The speech is not a caricature but rather an historically correct picture of a medical man of that time. It cannot have been Plato's intention to deride Eryximachus as a pedant, a system-monger, unduly fond of medicine.

Of course, this does not imply that Plato may not in some respects have made light of Eryximachus, just as he lets his humor play on Aristophanes and even on Socrates. Perhaps it is true that the physician "by his fine phrases works himself up to the belief in his own triumphant cleverness."<sup>23</sup> The words with which his encomium of Eros ends (188E) betray belief in his own wisdom and superiority, though it is fair to add that every one of the guests seems well content with his own contribution and that Eryximachus is at least aware of the possibility that involuntarily he may have omitted certain points or that Aristophanes might find a different manner of glorifying the god. This much, however, I venture to affirm: there is no reason to believe that Plato had only ridicule for Eryximachus' medical theories, or that he scoffed at his opinions in general and made him perform his assignment badly.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> The essay *On the Art* is usually considered the work of a sophist; e.g. Robin (see note 6) 24, note 2. That it must have been composed by a physician I have tried to show in *Περὶ τέχνης und die Sammlung der Hippokratischen Schriften, Problemata* iv (Berlin, 1931) 105 ff. (I should have known then that Wilamowitz, *Platon* 2 [Berlin, 1919] 253, has maintained the same view without, however, giving any further proof.) Even if the author were not a physician, no educated artisan of Eryximachus' time could be unaware of the issue; the exigencies of the situation in which he found himself demanded that he be concerned with it.

<sup>23</sup> Gildersleeve (see note 1) 109; cf. also Robin (see note 6) LVI.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Wilamowitz (see note 2) 367: ". . . und für seine Medizin hatte Platon im Grunde nur Spott, denn sie war keine Wissenschaft"; also *ibid.* 362. Among the detractors of Eryximachus' entire performance, F. G. Rettig, *Platons Symposion* 1 (Halle, 1876) 13 ff., is one of the most outspoken representatives. But cf. also Hug-Schöne (see note 3) xxxix.

As far as it is possible to infer his doctrine from his brief résumé of medicine, Eryximachus seems to have demanded that the physician do justice to the good desire of the body and restrain its bad desire, that he produce the one where it is missing, and alter the other where it is prevalent, distinguishing right and wrong in regard to repletion and evacuation (186B-D). Apparently the doctor can reach this goal only by prescribing an adequate regimen for the patient.<sup>25</sup> Now the "statesman" Plato rejects dietetic medicine: for the elaborate rules of diet, as he says in his criticism of the medical science proffered with so much severity in the *Republic*, are detrimental to the fulfilment of civic duties. Surgery and the application of drugs alone can therefore be considered legitimate means of treatment (405A-408B). Yet the "scientist" Plato judges dietetics as the only adequate control of sickness, while he condemns drugging as dangerous (*Timaeus* 89B-C).<sup>26</sup> Plato therefore must have felt some sympathy for Eryximachus' teaching. That he esteemed him and his father, that he respected their medical skill, is evident also from the *Phaedrus*. There the two are called upon as authorities (268A) together with other great artisans, Sophocles and Euripides (268c), and Hippocrates (270c), when the right procedure of any technique is examined.<sup>27</sup> Moreover

<sup>25</sup> Eryximachus expressly acknowledges that his art must take account of man's desires for the pleasure of eating (187E). The sources of his doctrine have been widely discussed. Taylor (see note 9) 218 holds that Pythagorean, Heraclitean and Empedoclean ideas are here amalgamated and that the theory as a whole is reminiscent of Sicilian medicine to which Plato was greatly indebted (*ibid.* 217). I hesitate to attach a label to Eryximachus' views; they are so vague that they seem compatible with the teaching of many schools. The closest parallel to Eryximachus' speech of which I am aware is to be found in the Hippocratic writing *On Ancient Medicine* where *πλήρωσις* and *κένωσις* are named as the tendencies to be considered in the healthy and in the sick (CMG 1.1 [see note 21] 42, lines 11-12; cf. 41, line 18, and *Symposium* 186c) and where the art of the physician is summarized as knowledge of the right kind of regimen. The passages adduced by Bury and Hug-Schöne (see note 3) *ad loc.* do not seem comparable; for in the Hippocratic books which they quote, *πλήρωσις* and *κένωσις* are not understood as tendencies of the body, as they are by Eryximachus, but rather as means of treatment on which the physician must rely.

<sup>26</sup> Note that Plato is aware of the seeming contradiction between his statements in the *Republic* and those in the *Timaeus*. For he recommends dietetics *καθ' ὅσον ἂν ᾗ τῷ σχολῇ* (*Timaeus* 89c). That most people have no leisure for the application of complicated dietetic rules was the decisive objection raised in the *Republic* (406c). Cf. also A. E. Taylor, *A Commentary on Plato's Timaeus* (Oxford, 1928) 628 [89c8].

<sup>27</sup> It is perhaps not amiss to point out that Eryximachus, "the noble son of a noble and sober father" (214B), attacks the bad habit of intoxication, and that Plato forbids the guardian of the *Republic* to indulge in *μέθη* (403E; cf. however *Laws* 637D ff.). Moreover, Acumenus, the father of Eryximachus, was fond of prescribing walks



in the *Protagoras*, Eryximachus' interest in questions of natural philosophy and astronomy is attested (315c). This too, in Plato's opinion, will have stood him in good stead.<sup>28</sup>

In his non-medical views Eryximachus is doubtless hinting at certain doctrines that are more fully developed in other Platonic writings. The sequence of arts which he advocates, the ascent from the bodily world through music and astronomy to the realm of the divine is the ascent which the *Republic* establishes in education and the *Timaeus* in the understanding of the cosmos. His definition of mantic foreshadows that given by Diotima.<sup>29</sup> The relative importance of his speech within the contest of orations is likewise obvious. It is his task to show the power of Eros in all departments of human activity. Phaedrus and Pausanias know only of Eros' significance for virtue, for morality. Aristophanes praises Eros as the aspiration of the soul that transcends itself and seeks its original unity. Agathon celebrates Eros as the possessor and dispenser of everything good. Eryximachus discusses one pertinent aspect of the subject that must be elaborated before Socrates can reveal the whole truth; and like all the other arguments, that of Eryximachus reappears in Socrates' encomium.<sup>30</sup>

(*Phaedrus* 227A). Simple kinds of gymnastics are advocated in the *Republic* (404B; E; 407B), and even in the *Timaeus* (89A), gymnastic exercises are defended as a method of purging and renewing the body. For Acumenus, cf. also Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 3.13.2.

<sup>28</sup> Wilamowitz (see note 2) 361 infers even from the *Protagoras* that Plato dislikes Eryximachus, for he appears "im Gefolge des Allerweltsweisen Hippias, den Platon besonders gering schätzt." But Eryximachus does no more than ask Hippias "some questions"; this can hardly have been a crime in Plato's eyes. Eryximachus' philosophical knowledge is apparent also in his speech; he quotes Heraclitus (187A), and his theory of the double Eros of the body may reflect the teaching of Empedocles; cf. Hug-Schöne (see note 3) xxxix.

<sup>29</sup> I have followed almost literally formulations of Friedländer (see note 9) 305. Even Wilamowitz (see note 2) 367, grants that Eryximachus has some ideas. The agreement between his "Wissenschaftslehre" and that of Plato has been most thoroughly discussed by Sybel (see note 20) 26 ff. His admiration for Eryximachus' doctrine is perhaps exaggerated, though P. Cesareo (*I due Simposi in rapporto all'arte moderna* [Palermo, 1901] 114; cf. also Gildersleeve [see note 1] 110) is mistaken in claiming that Sybel identified Eryximachus with Plato; he clearly saw the limitations of the physician's thought (cf. 27 with 30). The physician indeed rests his case at the point from which Plato takes his flight, as Friedländer says (*ibid.*), who has also pointed to the unfortunate tendency of the critics either to admire or to condemn the speakers altogether ([see note 9] 299, note 2).

<sup>30</sup> Taylor (see note 9) 218, characterizes Eryximachus as the speaker who treats the cosmic aspect of Eros, but cf. above note 20. For the relation of Socrates' speech to the preceding ones, cf. Bury (see note 3) lvii ff. That the speech of Aristophanes

Some interpreters charge Eryximachus with sophistry, obscurity and arbitrariness in dealing with his theme. They criticize the dogmatic manner in which he treats the views of Heraclitus (187A).<sup>31</sup> Yet the arguments he advances are certainly not worse, they rather seem better than those of the others, Socrates excepted; at least, Eryximachus reasons and is conversant with philosophy. There may be ambiguities and inconsistencies in his oration. Still Socrates reserves for him the compliment that he "fought well" (193E-194A). This praise, even if touched with irony, cannot be discounted, for Socrates notes whether the others speak "sufficiently and well" (177E).<sup>32</sup> The statement must mean that to Plato, Eryximachus was not the least noteworthy of the speakers.

Contrary to the contention, then, that the physician is represented as a pedant, that he makes a fool of himself whenever he starts discussing a medical topic or when he elaborates the main subject of the evening, he is portrayed realistically and with sympathy. This result, I think, squares well with the fact that Eryximachus, in addition to giving the speeches that have been considered so far, plays an important rôle throughout the symposium. If one analyzes the framework of the dialogue carefully, he realizes that the physician is by no means just one of the guests among the others, but is a prominent figure at the banquet.

First of all, Eryximachus is responsible for the decision that the symposium be not devoted to excessive drinking which would make it impossible that speeches be given at all. On his advice the company resolves that everybody drink only according to his pleasure (176D-E).<sup>33</sup> Moreover, it is he who moves that the flute-girl be dismissed and that the entertainment be conversation rather than music (176E). And it is he again who suggests that each guest

is a satire on the theories of Eryximachus and of physicians in general is a contention of Bury (*ibid.*, xxxi ff.) which I do not find convincing; Wilamowitz (see note 2) 367 seems to agree with Bury.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Bury (see note 3) *ad loc.*

<sup>32</sup> For the interpretation of the statement made in 177E, cf. Friedländer (see note 9) 299. Socrates' unqualified approval of Eryximachus can be fully appreciated only in comparison with his pretended praise of Agathon's speech which he immediately retracts (198A-B).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. above p. 86. Bury (see note 3) vii says that the potations are restricted on the proposal of Pausanias. But the latter asks only for deliberation (*σκοπέειν* 176A) and is apparently not aware of a good way to reach the ease which he wishes to enjoy (*ibid.*). Taylor (see note 9) 211 is right in stating that "on the advice of the physician Eryximachus" it is resolved that there be no enforced deep "potting."

make a speech in honor of Eros (176E–177D).<sup>34</sup> To be sure, “the tale is not his,” as he says himself (177A). Phaedrus has always wondered why none of the poets or sophists has ever given to Eros the praise due to him, and he has often expressed his astonishment to Eryximachus, his friend and lover (177A–C). But from Phaedrus’ protestation no action would ensue here and now, were it not for Eryximachus. If Phaedrus is “the father of the subject” (177D) that will be discussed, Eryximachus, one might say, is “the father of the debate” that is about to take place. Intent on prescribing the proper diet for his friends, on checking their bad desire and on encouraging their good one, and being the good doctor that he is, he knows when the right moment has come for action. He has diagnosed that these people who are disinclined to drink would be willing to listen to his condemnation of drunkenness (176C). He also diagnoses that the present occasion provides the opportunity for doing a favor to Phaedrus by celebrating Eros (177C).<sup>35</sup> For he feels sure that the guests will be delighted to praise this god: they are all lovers and in love (177D–E). The physician is not mistaken in his judgment. His motion that the banquet be celebrated by speeches on Eros is unanimously accepted (177E–178A).

But it is not only the introductory scene which is dominated by Eryximachus; even later he continues to play an outstanding part. Together with Phaedrus, he is the president of the banquet. Whenever the speeches are formally introduced or concluded, either Phaedrus or Eryximachus is addressed; whenever difficulties arise or a diverting chat sets in, one of the two intervenes or is drawn into the conversation. Pausanias addresses Phaedrus (180c; 185c), and so do Agathon (197c; E) and Socrates (212B; c). Phaedrus also puts an end to the quarrel between Socrates and Agathon (194D–E), and he authorizes Socrates to talk as he pleases (199B–C). Eryximachus, on the other hand, is the “guardian” (189A) over the speech of Aristophanes who directs his oration to him (189c; 193D). Socrates turns to Eryximachus before and after Agathon’s talk

<sup>34</sup> This fact, of course, is generally recognized. The statement of Wilamowitz (see note 2) 362 that Phaedrus “das Thema stellt” is obviously only a slip.

<sup>35</sup> In 176c, note the words: ἐπειδὴ οὖν μοι δοκεῖ οὐδεὶς τῶν παρόντων προθύμως ἔχειν πρὸς τὸ πολλὸν πίνειν οἶνον, ἴσως . . . ἤττον ἂν εἴην ἀγῆης, and again in 177c: ἐν τῷ παρόντι πρέπον μοι δοκεῖ εἶναι ἡμῖν τοῖς παροῦσι. To observe the *καιρός* is one of the main tasks of the physician, as is evident from the Hippocratic writings, cf. Edelstein (see note 22) 114.

(194A; 198A-B).<sup>36</sup> Last but not least, when Alcibiades threatens to make himself president of the banquet (213E) and urges the company to drink, Eryximachus saves the situation: he induces him to follow the procedure agreed upon at the beginning and to give a speech like the others (214A-C). Spurred on by Eryximachus, Alcibiades decides to praise Socrates (214D).<sup>37</sup>

In all the various acts of the symposium, then, Eryximachus appears as a person of distinction, a fact strangely neglected, it seems, by all modern interpreters in their evaluation of his rank among the guests. This physician is not simply on sufferance in the company with which he feasts.<sup>38</sup> He is their peer, nay, in some respects, their superior. For he exercises a certain authority over them. Within the framework of the dialogue, he is indeed more important than anybody else. Pausanias and Aristophanes and Socrates and even Agathon, the host, are but speakers; occasionally they participate in the interludes. Phaedrus assumes his place as president only through Eryximachus; it is mere politeness that he, to whom Eryximachus has given credit for his suggestion of the subject, is honored as the originator of the speeches. Eryximachus, however, lays the foundation for the whole contest. He holds the conversation together at the point where it is in danger of breaking up. As there would be no encomia of Eros without him, there would be no praise of Socrates without his insistence.

Now that the exceptional rôle of Eryximachus has become evident, one can hardly help asking whether it may be of some sig-

<sup>36</sup> Robin (see note 6) xiv seems astonished that Eryximachus fails to assume leadership in the conversation, while he characterizes Phaedrus as president of the banquet who is addressed by all the speakers. This has been shown to be erroneous. Incidentally, Socrates, though he addresses Phaedrus, also turns to the whole company (212B-C), and Alcibiades simply addresses the guests (215A), either because he considers himself president of the banquet (Robin, *ibid.*), or because the subject introduced by Eryximachus has been given up in favor of a new topic.

<sup>37</sup> That Socrates, too, is asked whether he agrees to Alcibiades' speaking (214E) seems natural and merely polite; it does not detract from the weight of Eryximachus' words. Bury (see note 3) xxiv has pointed out that in the "third act" account is taken only of Agathon, the host, Eryximachus and Socrates. Robin (see note 6) LIi thinks that Eryximachus' rôle in the scene in question only serves to emphasize the contrast between Alcibiades' originality and adventurous fantasy, and the mediocrity of the physician of the "juste milieu." Such an interpretation, however, hardly does justice to the significance of Eryximachus' intervention.

<sup>38</sup> Contrary to Gildersleeve, cf. above p. 85. If among those who leave the symposium, Phaedrus and Eryximachus alone are mentioned by name (223B), this is again an indication of their importance within the framework of the dialogue as well as a feature that stresses their moderation (Bury [see note 3] xxviii).

nificance that it is a physician who is given such a prominent position. Of course, it could be merely by chance that Eryximachus stands in the foreground of the scene. It may be that Phaedrus really talked to him in the way described; it may be that Eryximachus did suggest a eulogy of Eros at a banquet of which Plato had heard, and that he acted as president of the gathering because he had introduced the motion that led to the contest of speeches. On the other hand, even supposing that there was some historical evidence on which Plato based his report, he has surely taken great pains in describing Eryximachus and in portraying the physician. Twice he shows Eryximachus acting in this capacity, at the very beginning when he advises against μέθη (176c–d), and in the middle of the piece when he cures Aristophanes' hiccoughs (185d–e). In the final part, again, Alcibiades solemnly refers to Eryximachus as a physician (214b). One is never allowed to forget that he is a doctor. Could this be without meaning, just a fortuitous circumstance?

Yet, as Jowett says: "If it be true that there are more things in the *Symposium* of Plato than any commentator has dreamed of, it is also true that many things have been imagined which are not really to be found there."<sup>39</sup> I should hesitate to suggest an answer to the question raised, were it not certain that for Plato, the physician was an exemplar, that in his ethical inquiries he used the medical art as a simile. That Plato's thought is tinged by medical concepts has often been maintained during the past few decades.<sup>40</sup> As a matter of fact, it has been contended that medicine influenced him as deeply as did mathematics: while the latter shaped his natural philosophy, the former is said to have molded his ethical doctrine. From medicine, it has been assumed, Plato took the distinction between art and chance, between conscious and purposeful actions and haphazard decisions; the dignity of a practical science to which he wished to raise ethics already had been realized in the science of medicine. Even the definition of the aim of moral endeavor, which is based on the concept of an innate good of the

<sup>39</sup> Jowett (see note 10) 524.

<sup>40</sup> One of the first to deal with the subject was H. Nohl, *Sokrates und die Ethik* (Tübingen, 1904) 34 ff. The discussion of the problem has been placed on a broader basis by E. Hoffmann, "Der gegenwärtige Stand der Platonforschung," Anhang zu E. Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen* (2.1, 5th edition) 1070 ff. Cf. also W. Jaeger, *Paideia 2* (Oxford, 1944) 131; 145; 321 f., and Taylor (see note 9) 217.

soul, seems indebted to definitions of medical treatment that are based on the concept of an innate good of the body. Whether such assumptions are correct or not, it is a fact that for Plato the relationship between the physician and his patient served as a model of human relationship, and it is with his use of this parallel alone that I am here concerned.<sup>41</sup>

Plato finds occasion to mention the physician in his discussion of rulership (*Politicus* 293A–C); for the physician, to him, is the ruler of his patients. Whichever method of healing he may employ, whether he follow books or not, whether he be poor or rich, he is called a doctor, if he has knowledge of medicine and acts for the benefit of the sick. All prescriptions which such a man gives, even those which mean temporary harm or pain, are considered justified because he is an expert in his art, and people submit to his ordinances. This common attitude toward the doctor indicates the criterion of right rulership. It is not the social standing of the ruler, nor the attestation of his prescripts, nor their specific content that matters; it is his knowledge alone that decides about his fitness. The example of the physician, to be sure, is not the only one through which Plato clarifies this view. He refers also to the trainer (294D), to the captain (297A), and finally to the weaver (308D). But the physician is the most representative type of the ruler and remains in the foreground of the discussion. He is mentioned together with the trainer (295C) and the captain (298A ff.), he alone is selected when the general definition of rulership is given (293C), and Plato says expressly that his art provides an especially good example of right rule (293B; cf. 296B–C).<sup>42</sup>

Moreover, there is apparently one characteristic of rulership that can be brought out solely by looking at the "image" of the

<sup>41</sup> In another paper I propose to deal in detail with the general bearing of medicine on Platonic ethics and at the same time to investigate the use of the simile of the physician in early and late Greek philosophy. Generally speaking, it seems to me that the distinction between *τέχνη* and *τύχη* is to be found not only in medicine but also in other arts, just as the innate good of the object is a concern not only of the physician but also of other artisans; e.g. *Gorgias* 503E, and P. Shorey, *The Idea of Good in Plato's Republic*, *University of Chicago Studies in Classical Philology* 1 (Chicago, 1895) 227. It is most of all the general analogy between body and soul that has influenced Plato's thought.

<sup>42</sup> Note the words: *τοὺς ἰατροὺς οὐχ ἥκιστα νενομίκαμεν*. L. Campbell, *The Sophistes and Politicus of Plato* (Oxford, 1867) *ad loc.*, translates "and physicians more especially." H. N. Fowler's translation (Plato 3 [Loeb] 1925), "And physicians offer a particularly good example," seems more adequate.

physician. He does not only command, he sees to it that his patients understand the rules given and follow them voluntarily. Certainly, the slave doctor behaves differently. Without asking the sick for an account of their diseases, he prescribes like an autocrat what he thinks necessary (*Laws* 720c). Not so, however, the freeborn doctor. He talks to his patients, he learns from them and in turn instructs them. He gives no prescription until he has persuaded the sick, and he leads them on by persuasion (*ibid.* 720D–E). For his leadership rests on persuasion, not on force (*ibid.* 722B). It is true that if the slave doctor were ever to meet the freeborn doctor and to witness his procedure, he would burst into laughter and say with contempt that the patient wishes to regain his health, that he does not wish to become a doctor himself (*ibid.* 857C–E). Yet it is exactly the aim of the good doctor to educate his patient as well as to heal him, and in this respect he is the model of the true ruler.<sup>43</sup>

The simile of the physician, then, has indeed great significance for Plato, though at the same time its limitations must not be overlooked. It is the statesman or the lawgiver rather than the philosopher whom he compares with the physician. Quite a different human relationship prevails between the philosopher and his pupil and the statesman or lawgiver and the citizen. For while the statesman is, or ought to be, an expert who rules over men through a knowledge which he has but they lack, or governs and educates them by means of laws, the philosopher does not exercise any rule, nor is he supposed to teach others the truth which he has in his possession. The philosopher, as Socrates says himself, practices the art of the midwife. He has no wisdom within himself, he can only help his fellows to bring forth their own knowledge (*Theaetetus* 149A ff.). Later philosophers glorify the philosopher as the physician of the soul. To Plato, however, philosophy is not a kind of medicine tending the patient on his sickbed and

<sup>43</sup> For *Laws* 720c ff. and 857c, cf. also W. Jaeger, *Paideia* 3 (New York, 1944) 215. I am not sure that Plato's account is historically correct in all respects. The distinction between slave doctors who treat slaves and freeborn doctors who treat freeborn patients is not warranted by the evidence available. On the other hand, the good doctor did hold converse with the sick, even though he did not educate them to be physicians, and medical men even wrote books on diseases for the use of laymen. Nor can there be any doubt that the physicians considered their relationship to their patients as that of a ruler to his subjects. Cf. in general Edelstein (see note 22) 102; 105, note 1.

putting him under the spell of sound and salutary tales through which he will be able to void his vast overload of sins and fill instead "his fearful emptiness of righteousness" (Philo, *Quis rer. div. heres*, 297). To Plato, the philosopher is not a physician, sitting in his clinic where people come with their sickness that he may lecture them and heal them through his words, imparting wisdom to them (Epictetus, 3.23.30). The Platonic philosopher is but a humble helper in the search for truth; unlike the statesman or law-giver, he has no authority over men, nor does he strive for it.<sup>44</sup>

The comparisons of the philosopher with a midwife, of the statesman with a physician, occur only in the later works of Plato, the *Theaetetus*, the *Politicus*, the *Laws*. Yet they express in a pregnant form a belief that is inherent, I think, in all Platonic writings. The earlier dialogues, always ending with a negative result, are full of Socrates' protestation that "he does not know." The theory of recollection of the truth rests on the assumption that the knowledge resides in man's own thought. The method of the philosopher, as it is finally evolved, is that of dialectics, and it is his art of dialectics which Socrates likens to the art of midwifery (*Theaetetus* 161E). Even in the *Gorgias* where two arts are distinguished, the one dealing with the body, the other with the soul, it is legislation and justice, not philosophy, that are compared with gymnastics and medicine (464B). Nor is the fundamental distinction between philosopher and statesman impaired by Plato's assertion that one day the king must become a philosopher, or the philosopher a king, if the state of affairs in this world is ever to change for the better. In the exercise of their functions as philosopher and statesman there would still be the difference between authoritative rule and dialectical investigation. If the statesman rises above the sophist, the philosopher rises above the statesman in more than a geometrical proportion (*Politicus* 257B).

<sup>44</sup> As far as I know, it is only in *Phaedo* 89A that Socrates is said to act like a physician. But here, diagnosing his listeners' diseases — they are perturbed by the objections raised — he heals them through an exhortatory speech, not through philosophical teaching. In an analogous way, the simile is applied by Protagoras who states that in education the sophist changes the soul by the use of words, just as the physician changes the body by the use of drugs (*Theaetetus* 167A). The difference of the simile of the physician from that of the midwife has not sufficiently been stressed by Hoffmann (see note 40) 1075. Incidentally, Zeller ([see note 40] 637, note 2) claims that *Republic* 489B–c identifies the philosopher with the physician. Yet apart from the fact that only one detail is selected for comparison, in the passage in question the philosopher is viewed as the ruler of the many.



The bearing of the simile of the physician having been outlined, it should now be possible to conjecture with some assurance whether the rôle of Eryximachus in the *Symposium* has any meaning in regard to its content. That Plato, in depicting Eryximachus, was guided by his view of the physician's art as a model seems obvious. Eryximachus rules over his patients by virtue of his knowledge, he persuades them so that they obey him voluntarily. When he has learned from the guests what their complaints are, he gives his advice and they in turn are persuaded and obey him (176D). When Aristophanes turns to Eryximachus and informs him of his sickness, the physician enumerates in detail three possible means of treatment, and thus instructs Aristophanes how to take care of his ailment; he does not prescribe any one treatment in an autocratic manner.<sup>45</sup> Nor are Eryximachus' friends less aware of the fact than is Plato that the physician is a ruler, that he must be esteemed as such. When Alcibiades is asked by Eryximachus: "What are we going to do," he answers: "Whatever you command, for it is necessary to obey you; the leech is of the worth of many other men" (214B).<sup>46</sup> Of course, I do not mean to claim that all the features of Plato's interpretation of the doctor's relationship to his patients are woven into this dialogue. The representation of Eryximachus is not a paradigm of the medical art. But the essential characteristics of the good doctor are sharply accentuated in his portrait. He prescribes, the others follow his instructions. His wisdom is superior; the others, in their failings, acquire insight from him that they themselves do not possess. They are led to grasp the truth by persuasion.

And is this not exactly the experience of him who listens to the various speeches given at the banquet? Each of the speakers talks with authority, in a dogmatic fashion. Their teaching is non-dialectical and therefore unphilosophical. Even Socrates is not in his usual mood. Although he chides Agathon for believing that wisdom could flow from one person into another as water flows

<sup>45</sup> Much has been written on the meaning of this episode which causes Eryximachus to speak in place of Aristophanes. Within the context of the whole, the scene may have been introduced so as to make the intended order of the speeches appear incidental, cf. K. Reinhardt, *Platons Mythen* (Bonn, 1927) 63; Friedländer, *Platon* 1 (Berlin and Leipzig, 1928) 187 f., but it also serves to underline the position of the physician at the banquet.

<sup>46</sup> The verse from Homer (*Iliad* 11.517) is also quoted in the *Politicus* (297E), cf. above p. 98.

through wool from a fuller cup into one that is emptier (175D), later on he himself imparts the knowledge that he has obtained from Diotima with the assurance of the initiated. And could not all of the speakers say what Socrates says at the end of his oration (212B): of this I am persuaded and of this I try to persuade others? For they no less than Socrates have indulged in the recounting of mythical tales of the truth of which one cannot be sure, but can only be persuaded, and can only hope to persuade others.<sup>47</sup> Besides, their speeches are encomia (e.g. 177E), eulogies of a god or demon, just as Alcibiades' oration is an encomium (214D) of Socrates, who embodies the ideal of the good man. Such encomia the *Republic* leaves to poetry as its sole and justifiable province after Homer and the tragedians have been expelled from the city (607A). In the *Symposium* they are recited in competition with the works of poets and sophists who have neglected their duty of praising Eros (177A-B).<sup>48</sup> They are composed with that true rhetorical art which is allied with kingly statesmanship and uses myths for the persuasion of the many (*Politicus* 304C-D). Although they are so wondrous that one forgets oneself in hearing them and wishes them to be retold again and again, they do not convey the truth in philosophical terms; nor are they capable of doing so on account of their subject matter. For Eros leads man to the vision of the beautiful which he beholds but with "the eye of faith and desire,"<sup>49</sup> while it is thought that enables him to ascertain the good through dialectics, and thus to know.

That the physician, the exemplar of authority that persuades, is given such a significant rôle in the *Symposium*, is, I suggest, an intentional device of Plato. It is meant to emphasize the singularity of the content of this dialogue, the specific character of its method and instruction. Many other features of the framework of

<sup>47</sup> That the content of the *Symposium* is mythical has been acknowledged by Friedländer (see note 45) 207 and by Wilamowitz, who has especially stressed the non-dialectical character of its teaching ([see note 2] 360) and the fact that Socrates speaks only of persuasion ([see note 22] 170 f.). P. Frutiger, *Les Mythes de Platon* (Paris, 1930) 112 ff., judges differently, but he fails to account for the features just referred to. To be sure, the myth told by Socrates is a "true myth," based on the *logos*, while the others are not (cf. Friedländer, *ibid.* 207 f.). Fundamentally, however, all orations are unphilosophical, at least from the standpoint of the Platonic system.

<sup>48</sup> The relation of the passage in the *Republic* to the *Symposium* has been pointed out by Friedländer (see note 45) 142; the rhetorical character of the speeches has been stressed by Jaeger (see note 40) 180.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Jowett (see note 10) 533.

the *Symposium* seem to serve the same purpose.<sup>50</sup> With the exception of Socrates, no philosopher is present at this banquet at which speeches are prescribed as a kind of diet for those who feel unable to drink as much as would fit the occasion. Even if these people are highly educated and cultured, they are not investigators of the truth in their own right. Nor do they belong to the inner circle of Socrates' friends; they are outsiders, living far apart from the man who is the wisest of his generation, or, like Alcibiades, unable to submit to his guidance. Even those who retell the conversation are among the least noble of Socrates' pupils; Aristodemus who apes him in externals (173B), and Apollodorus, a crazy fellow (173D), not a sober thinker but rather a passionate enthusiast who cannot control his emotions (*Phaedo* 117D). Finally, the people to whom the story is told are business men, men of the practical life (173C). It is as if Plato, by giving such a setting to his work, had attempted to treat with irony the teaching of that dialogue which to so many generations has seemed his greatest on account of the seducing splendor of its beauty. Perhaps he was aware of the fact that if it were taken as his final word, as his deepest insight, reason might find it difficult to assert the supremacy which he attributed to thinking, even above the claim of beauty.

<sup>50</sup> For the interpretation of the framework of the dialogue, cf. also Friedländer (see note 9) 295 ff.; Wilamowitz (see note 2) 359 f.