Is Socrates a Model for the Rest of Us?

INTRODUCTION

In the other essays in this book, I have drawn heavily on Platonic writings, and especially on the philosophical psychology found in parts of *The Republic,* in order to argue against what I have called the traditional, Augustinian understanding of the power of eros—the account of our sexual desires that dominates so much contemporary thought of both left and right. I have argued that, despite some of what Socrates says in *The Republic*, Plato did not believe, as conservative Augustinians do, that sexual desire is an all-powerful, and dangerous force that has to be restrained or repressed by external or internal forces if we are to live decent if not necessarily happy lives. Nor did he take opposite liberationist view, and hold that human happiness is only possible if we remove all restraints on our all powerful sexual desires. Instead he held that the physical desire for sex is made powerful only when it becomes is an expression of a deeper, spiritual desire he calls eros. And he suggested that the ideal human life is one in which eros is expressed in ways that enable us to, in so far as possible, satisfy that deeper desire.

Here I want to focus on the one particular text, *The Symposium,* that might seem to support an Augustinian of sexual desire and show why that reading is wrong.

As traditionally understood, the *Symposium* is a work that teaches us why we should, in so far as possible, express eros in higher, non sexual ways. We should, in other words, climb what has come to be called the ladder of love described in Socrates' speech. The ladder of love is Socrates' portrayal of the struggle of human beings who, traditional readings suggest, move with some difficulty from lower, bodily, to higher, more spiritual, expressions of eros. Socrates seems to teach—and most readers take him to be expressing Plato's views in doing so—that as we move up the ladder, we leave behind lower forms of erotic life until we reach what he claims is the highest, best, and most fulfilling way of expressing eros, one that dispenses with both sexual desire and an intimate connection to other particular people entirely. This movement from sexual to non-sexual and personal to impersonal expressions of eros is often thought to be motivated by something like an Augustinian critique of sexual desire.

On my view, the *Symposium* teaches nothing of the sort. To anyone coming to the text without blinders, it gives an account of sexuality radically different from the Augustinian account. And, even more, I shall argue Socrates' defense of the movement from sexual to non-sexual and personal to impersonal expressions is far more subtle and qualified than it seems at first look and that, even more, Socrates' view of eros is deeply called into question by the setting of the text and by the other speeches, and especially that of Alcibiades.

The best way to come to a new and better understanding of *The Symposium* is to recognize that, as Plato describes him, Socrates is not a model for the rest of us. He is, instead, one of a kind. Socrates did not come to pursue the satisfaction of eros in philosophic contemplation by means of climbing the ladder of love. For some strange reason we will have to explore he was always there at the top. So to the extent that Socrates in *The Symposium* expressed eros in essentially a non-sexual way, his life is not and cannot be a model for how *we* should express our erotic desires. And, if we think that Plato is recommending that we try to move up the ladder of love, then we cannot do so in the way Socrates might have. Life at the top of the ladder is a way of life largely freed from all lower expressions of eros. But *The Symposium* ultimately shows this is fundamentally not a way of life open to us. We are very much unlike Socrates. And thus we cannot live wholly in pursuit of a non-sexual and impersonal good. Indeed we shall see that even to aspire to live a life freed from sexual and personal expressions of eros is potentially dangerous, not just to our well being and happiness but even to our pursuit of wisdom.

The *Symposium* does teach us that there are tensions in our erotic lives and to some extent those tensions arise because we are both bodies and souls. But, as I briefly suggested in the first of these essays, these tensions are not the product of the all powerful force of sexual desire. To the contrary, they are the product of the contrast between our fundamental desire for an erotic connection to a particular other

person—a desire rooted in our the weakness of our bodies and the individuality of our soul that together makes us long to be known by and to life live with another human being—and our recognition that erotic desire cannot be wholly satisfied in loving another human being. This is true for two reasons.

First, whether we can find someone who we can love and who loves us is highly uncertain. And sustaining such a love is difficult. So we seek some escape from the difficulties of romantic love by moving up the ladder of love and trying to satisfy eros—the desire to possess the good forever—first in forming a family, then in political life and, ultimately, in philosophic / artistic life. (I will call this simply the philosophic life in the rest of this paper, although I will explain later why I think Plato in *The Symposium* means us to understand philosophy as encompassing what we today might call artistic invention and scientific discovery)

Second, people whose erotic passions are particularly strong will find that the desire to pursue the good forever cannot be satisfied entirely in the love of another person. Instead, eros drives some of us to pursue a connection to the world around us that is broader than that which can be encompassed in the love of another person.

But the stronger our erotic desires, and the more we seek to satisfy them in politics and philosophy, the more we find that we cannot wholly escape an erotic connection to other human beings. We need others, it turns out, not just to sustain us as individuals, but to help us in the pursuit of the very goods that diminish our attachment to particular other people. We even need sex, not just to connect us to particular others but reconcile us to our bodies, and to help us learn who we are and how we stand in the world.

The *Symposium* ends, I believe, in a vision of a perfect love, one that does not, as traditional interpretations see it, take us far from an attachment to a particular other person, but instead seeks to combine the love of a particular other person with the pursuit of the most abstract good in one whole life. And yet, in seeing why this perfect love satisfies our deepest and most powerful aspiration for wholeness and permanence, Plato reveals to us why we have little hope of fully satisfying that aspiration. To paraphrase something Freud says in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, perfect happiness for human beings does not seem to be part of the plan of the universe. Plato ultimately teaches us not to give up our aspirations, but to moderate them in light of the difficulties of satisfying them in every respect. He teaches us to try to find the best possible way of moving between the various expressions of eros available to us, knowing that in this world there is no escape from the tensions between particular and abstract expressions of eros—or even between different particular and abstract expressions of eros.[1]

Author's note: An earlier and very different version of this paper appears under this title in Craig de Paulo, Patrick Messina, and Marc Stier, eds. *Ambiguity in the Western Mind*. The current text is a substantial revision that brings out some themes that were only implicit in the early version. The original text was written to be delivered as a talk at conference sponsored by the Intellectual Heritage Program of Temple University entitled "Ambiguity in the Western Tradition." It was directed not to specialists on Plato but to anyone interested in the issues raised by the text. As such, my argument does not turn on any disputes about the meaning or translation of particular passages. So it has not seemed necessary to point the reader to the particular passages I paraphrase. Only specific quotes are referenced. They are given by Stephanus numbers and are to the translation by Seth Bernadete *Plato's Symposium*, (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2001). In the discussion that followed my presentation, Patrick Messina, Craig de Paul, Daniel P. Tompkins, and Robert Guay asked very helpful questions that shaped the revision of the paper.

[1]Thus I see the ladder of love in the Symposium as a vision akin to that of the ideal political community city or the kallipolis in *The Republic*. A number of interpreters have argued, to my mind quite plausibly, that Socrates' account of the kallipolis is not meant to be taken seriously. (See Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990); Allan Bloom, Commentary on The Republic in Giants and Dwarfs (Touchstone, 1991), and Mary Nichols, *Socrates and the Political Community: An Ancient Debate (*State University Press of New York, 2006). On this, still controversial interpretation, the kallipolis is meant to show us not an ideal polity but, rather, to teach us why the tensions between individual and common good found in any form of political life cannot be wholly overcome. I believe a parallel point is being made in *The Symposium*. There are important

Reading Plato

My interpretation takes for granted a way of reading Plato that is profoundly different from traditional views of *The Symposium* and other Platonic dialogues. On the common view, Socrates is the spokesman of Plato. In recent years, an alternative to this idea has attracted a number of important interpreters of Plato.[2] It holds that Socrates is one voice among many in this dialogue. And Plato's own view is said to be found not just in what Socrates says, but also in what some of the other characters in the dialogues say and, also, in both the dramatic context in which they say it, and the dramatic context in which it is presented to us.

I will not argue here for this way of reading the works of Plato. That is a topic for another day. Rather, I will try to extend the work of those who have studied the *Symposium* in this light. After all, the ultimate appeal of any hermeneutic strategy is rooted in what it enables us to discover in a text. The best defense of the way of reading I follow is that it enables us to learn something important from a text.

While most of the works that interpret the *Symposium* as a dramatic work break in one way or another from the traditional view of the place of Socrates in the dialogue, they still take the philosophic life described and exemplified by Socrates as the model of human excellence. It is true that some of these interpreters qualify this view to one degree or another. Still, for all their interpretative daring, most contemporary views of the *Symposium* do not step so far away from the traditional picture of Socrates. Most of them still take it for granted that Plato holds Socrates up to us a role model, that is, as someone whose pursuit of the beauty and the good exemplifies the highest and best form of erotic life. In this paper I would like to sketch an interpretation of the *Symposium* that calls this view of Socrates into question.[3]

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differences between the texts. As Stanley Rosen has pointed out in *Plato's Symposium* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), *The Republic* abstracts from eros while *The Symposium* focuses on it. That is *The Symposium* focuses on tensions between individual and common good and proposes a solution that, because it leaves erotic desire to one side, presupposes that individuals can live without strong erotic attachments to particular individuals. *The Symposium*, on the other hand one focuses on the tensions between particular and abstract ways of satisfying erotic desire in the life of individuals.

[2]Or, more accurately, has been recovered as some early interpreters of Plato took this same view. The way I read Plato is most closely associated with the name of Leo Strauss. See, among many other works, *The City and Man* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990). But there are many others read who read Plato in this non-traditional way and yet do not share Strauss's hermeneutic (or political) views. In reading the *Symposium* as I do, I have been most influenced by Stanley Rosen, *Plato's Symposium*; Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and Allan Bloom, "The Ladder of Love" in *Plato's Symposium*, (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2001) all of whom take the dialogue form of Plato's writing seriously. Although my focus on and conclusions about the text are different from that found in these three works, I am very much indebted to them for both the manner in which I read the text and for some of the particular interpretative points I make.

[3] One other new feature of my interpretation of *The Symposium* is that I take seriously Socrates' claim that eros, the desire to possess the good forever, motivates people at each step on the ladder of love and I pay close attention to the transitions between one step on the ladder and the next. I think it is pretty obvious not only that most people do not move far up the ladder of love—as Socrates would expect—and also that most people do not move among the lower rungs in the same way. For example, people may express eros in the search for someone with a good soul and then later come to appreciate the physical pleasures of sex and become for a time sexually promiscuous in pursuit of such pleasure. What is important for my argument is not the order in which our erotic lives develop but that Plato has shown us that there is a plausible path from one stage to another. For example, I argue below that a life devoted to promiscuous sexual pleasure can lead us to recognize that beauty of soul is more important to us than beauty of body. I think this claim is not only plausible but that it points to something important about our sexual and erotic lives.

SOCRATES AND EROS

Let me begin by noting some peculiarities of the portrayal of Socrates in the *Symposium*.

First: Socrates had to learn about eros from someone else, that is from a woman name Diotima. Though he calls himself an expert in erotics, Socrates seems to have gained his expertise not through his own investigation but by being taught by Diotima. This is very much unlike Socrates' usual way of proceeding. Why is that?

Second: Alcibiades tells us that Socrates does not have the bodily desires of other human beings. On military campaign he needs neither food nor shelter. He is not bothered by cold. He can drink without getting drunk. And he can go for long periods of time without sleep.

Third: Alcibiades also reveals to us that, while Socrates pretends to have an erotic interest in the young men with whom he spends his time, he actually has little or no such concern. In particular, he is immune to the extraordinary beauty and sexual charms of Alcibiades himself.

What is the explanation of these three peculiarities? Plato's answer, I suggest, is that Socrates is fundamentally different from the rest of us. He does not explain how he is different in his speech. But, if we combine ideas that Socrates presents with those of Aristophanes and look, too, at what Alcibiades tells us about Socrates, the answer becomes clear. We are justified in combining the accounts of Aristophanes and Socrates because Socrates himself brings Aristophanes ideas into his own telling of the story of eros. (Aristophanes, himself notices this immediately after Socrates' speech.) And Alcibiades provides an important corrective to Socrates story of himself. This, I suggest, is precisely why Socrates objects to Alcibiades' speech. Socrates does not tell us how different he is from others. Indeed, he seems to go far to keep this difference quiet. But, over Socrates' objection, Alcibiades reveals us Socrates' true nature.

ARISTOPHANES AND EROS

Aristophanes teaches us that erotic desire of the kind with which we are most familiar—what we today call romantic love—is the product of a cataclysm in which the Gods ripped our bodies in two. We were once a whole composed of four legs and arms and two faces. It is only because we have been split into two that we so frantically search for our other half and when we find that person—or the best available substitute—we clasp them to ourselves as if to reunite forever.

Yet, while erotic desire in the narrow sense is a product of our mutilation, something akin to eros in the larger sense existed before this transformation in our nature. Aristophanes tells us that, before this cataclysm, human beings were powerful creatures. And he says that the Gods mutilated us precisely because we challenged them. The nature of the challenge is not made explicit in the text. But if we think about what the Gods have and we lack, the answer should be obvious: immortality. The pre-cataclysmic humans sought, as Socrates teaches us eros still leads us to do today, to possess the good forever.

The consequence of being divided by the Gods is that we human beings are drastically weakened. We need to be clear about exactly how we are made weaker by being split in two. The best way to answer that question is to ask another: After we are split, why are we so determined to find our other half? There are two, related answers to this question. One I will discuss here, and the other I will examine later in the paper.

The first answer is that we need our other half because of the physical weaknesses of our bodies. Aristophanes suggests that we human beings, in our original form, lead physical lives that are untroubled. Before we were divided, we were powerful creatures with enormous strength and speed. We had physical needs in our original state—although not the need for sex. But the strength and power of having four arms and legs—and, in Aristophanes' wonderful image, of moving at incredible speed by doing cartwheels—enabled us to satisfy those needs without difficulty. Now, however, our lives are plagued by bodily needs

that, given our weakened state, are difficult to satisfy. And then, too, there are the possibilities of ill health and natural disaster that were undoubtedly of much less concern to human beings before we were mangled by the Gods.

So we seek support from other human beings to make up for our physical weakness. But if the first trouble that leads us to seek our other half is physical, why do we seek particular human beings? Why are we so determined to find our other half? We need to pair up to overcome our physical deficiencies. But why are we so choosy about the person with whom we pair up? Why wouldn't any other human being do?

The answer is that the weakness of our bodies leads to tensions—and worse—in the relationship between human beings. The original human beings had two faces. But we were not thereby divided. Our two sides had no trouble working together. Indeed, Aristophanes tells us that, by working together, we worked with other four armed and legged creatures to challenge the Gods themselves.

But, after we are split apart by the Gods, and are drastically weakened, the physical challenge of staying alive and reproducing is so much greater. Goods that were once easy to obtain are so much harder to come by. While once our human powers gave us plenty, now the danger of poverty is ever present. And, as a result, we human beings struggle not just with nature but with one another to satisfy our physical needs. Simply put, we live in a world that does not have enough goods things to go around.[4]

Because we are so physically weakened and our situation is so desperate, we need much help from others. Yet given that we are struggling for a limited supply of goods, tensions between human beings are inevitable. And then the critical questions arise: who will support us and who we will support? Who can we count on? And who can count on us? These fundamental questions of politics only arise because we are so challenged by the physical debilities created when we are ripped in two by the Gods.[5]

And, of course, politics is not the only product of our weakness. Politics is an imperfect solution to the difficulties we face because the polity may demand some of us to sacrifice ourselves for the good of the political community as a whole. Political survival may, that is, require military sacrifice. So we look to deeper ties, not to a group, but to particular other people for whom we are of the greatest importance. We look to our families. And, we create our own families. We pair up because life is too hard to face on our own, and because we can't count on the generality of human beings, or even those with whom we share a political life, to care for us as we care for ourselves.

Pairing up is the natural response of human beings to our weaknesses. It is, however, hard to do. For the complete mutuality of interest and concern we seek is difficult to find or contrive. That is why we look with such desperation for our other half. We are all searching for that one person who we know will care for us as we care for ourselves.

After we are mangled by the Gods, we human beings search for other half. But, Aristophanes tells us, once we find our other half, we want to stay with them forever. This creates a problem, both for human beings and for the gods. Human beings start to die because we want to do nothing but hug our other half. And, as we start to die off, the Gods fear that they won' get the sacrifices they so want for us.

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[4] At least that was the state of humankind in the ancient world. With the explosion of productivity in the modern world things are now different and the struggle over material goods is not quite as intense. Still, that struggle is not entirely over and, as we shall see, there are other sources of tension between human beings.

[5] Plato thus gives us a portrayal of a pre-political life in *The Symposium* that parallels the city of pigs in *The Republic* and, of course, the Garden of Eden in the *Bible* (and, in modern thought, the state of nature.) What the Symposium gives us, however, is not just a portrayal of life before politics but, also, a portrayal of life before love becomes important to human beings. Rousseau's state of nature is thus closer to that found in Plato than that of Hobbes or Locke.

In what I think is the most charming part of *The Symposium*, Aristophanes tells us how and why sex is invented. Sex, it turns out, was created by the Gods as a means by which humans can express their connection to each other in such a powerful way that they can then move on to something else, if only for a time. Aristophanes suggests that we move on to service to the Gods. But given that we seek our other half in part to sustain ourselves physically, we can also see the need to temporarily part from our other half as critical our survival, as it gives us time to eat and sleep and perhaps most of all work. What makes this separation possible is that sex, and especially orgasm, allows us to become one for a short time. And becoming one enables us to bear separating temporarily from our other half, knowing that we will want to come back together and thus that we will remain deeply concerned about the fate of our other half.

Of course, as Aristophanes might have added, we don't always want to come back together again. The desire to find our other half—and the disappointment when we wrongly think we have found that person—is one reason sex, or the aftermath of sex, can be so disappointing when we are with the wrong person. An unhappy sexual experience or the discovery that we can't bear the intimacy sex has created with a person who turns out to be not so appealing, quickly drives us away from that person. Sexual desire, on this account is not primarily for the body but for the soul. It is a means by which we use intense physical pleasure to express and / or create a connection to our other half that is so powerful that we can bear to part with him or her for a time.

As Martha Nussbaum has pointed out,[6] the search for our other half is deeply problematic. She notes that the comic vision in Aristophanes' speech hides a deeper, more tragic vision. Aristophanes does not encourage—or at least doe not initially encourage—us to identify with these mutilated creatures. Rather, Aristophanes encourages us to look at the desperate search for one's other half from the outside. And from that standpoint, our frantic pursuit of our other half, and our even more frantic attempts to become one with them when we find them, are the stuff of comedy. Iago's picture of what we look like having sex—the beast with two backs—points to just how odd two lovers look from the outside. Like all comedy, the humor in this situation is only possible if we distance ourselves from the beings depicted by Aristophanes. We have to see our own situation as superior to that of the mutilated human beings. When, however, we recognize that we are those creatures, when we look at them from the inside, when we identify with them, the tragedy of their lives, and our own, is apparent. It is wonderful to find our other half. But Aristophanes' picture of our lives suggests that doing so is difficult if not impossible. So much can go wrong. What are the odds of finding our other half in a world of billions of people? How can we be sure we won't miss them? What if find our other half but do so too late, after we have formed a relationship and have had children with someone else? And what happens to us when our other half dies before us?

Finding our other half is only part of the problem. For, the deeper point of the story is that our mutilation has made true union with our other half profoundly impossible. That true union we seek cannot be attained. We can not be joined together physically. And, as the story of Hephaestus welding us together—and leaving us to die—suggests, physical union is not enough. We are separate individuals and are bound to remain so. We always see others, and even our other half, in large part from the outside, not the inside. It is difficult, if not impossible, to fully share the ends of other people, even those whom we love. Sometimes when our lover's aims are realized we can be as happy as when our aims are realized. Sometimes our own ends are not competing with our lover's. But while love goes a long way to overcome the differences between too people, it is truly a matter of extremely good fortune when lovers are entirely free of conflicting interests or points of view and do not find things that they dislike in each other..

What is the source of this difficulty? I have pointed out that the problem is not just that we have separate bodies. The real difficulty is that our souls—our ends and goals, our preferences and styles —differ. Yet, the issue is perhaps even more complicated. For is it not the split in our once unified bodies

[6] *The Fragility of Goodness,* chapter 6.

that also divides our souls? Because our bodies have been split in two, our souls have taken divergent paths. We each have our own feelings and emotional reactions, our likes and dislikes and our own experiences that have given shape to us. And we each have our own bodies about which to be concerned. If we didn't have bodies then, perhaps, we could find a way to go back and share in every experience that has shaped us and be with each other all the time now. Perhaps our souls could merge. But the rupture in the unity of our bodies creates a similar rupture in our souls.

DIOTIMA'S TEACHING

The account of eros Socrates gives—which he say he learned from the priestess Diotima—fits well with that of Aristophanes, but then transcends it. Or perhaps I should say it shows us how we can (partly) transcend it. Socrates' account of eros teaches us that our ultimate erotic aim is not to form a romantic relationship with one other person but to possess the good forever. We want to live forever in possession of those goods that make us happy. But we cannot live forever. So we seek some substitute for an eternal life of happiness. We are lead, Socrates teaches us to procreate in light of beauty. Procreation—whether of children or of a way of life or of an aesthetic or philosophic vision—is a means by which we try to make something that will endure beyond our own lives. And to say we procreate in beauty is to say we try to make something that is noble and splendid and thus deserving of immortality. We are inspired by a vision of beauty and nobility to create something that attains a similar beauty and nobility. Such a creation will last, if not forever, than for a long enough time that it, too, will be an inspiration which stimulates others to procreate as well.

As Diotima describes it to Socrates, our individual pursuit of a good that will last forever can take many different paths. These different paths form what has been called a ladder of love, in which we—or at least some of us—move from lower to higher forms of erotic expression.

Sexual Love of One

We all begin at the lowest level with the recognition of the physical beauty of one person. Physical beauty in one person stimulates a desire to have sex with that person. If we remain at this initial step in the ladder of love, sex leads to the procreation of a child who will, we hope, look like us, thus allow some part of us to survive our death.

I want to stop for a moment and point out a potential problem for the Socratic account of eros here.[7] Socrates' suggestion that the pursuit of sexual pleasure satisfies our erotic hunger to possess the good forever runs up against what looks like a fatal flaw: human beings try very hard to secure sexual pleasure without producing children. How, that is, can we understand contraception on the Socratic model of sexual desire?

There are, I think, three ways of reconciling Socrates' teaching with what we know about human sexual desire.

The first is to suppose that in addition to the sexual desire stimulated by eros, by the desire to pursue the good forever, there is another kind of sexual desire, one that aims purely at physical pleasure. I suggested such a possibility in the first essay in the book when I pointed out that there might be some basic, physical sexual desire that is actually quite weak when not accompanied by eros. While I believe there is something to this claim, it does not really help us as it fits neither our experience nor the text of *The Symposium*. For our experience and the text suggests that pursuit of sexual pleasure in itself can, under some circumstances, be a very powerful force. And, if I was right in the first essay to argue along

[7] As far as I know, this problem has not been noticed by previous interpreters of the text.

with Socrates that it is eros, not some independent bodily desire, that gives force to our pursuit of sexual pleasure, then we have to understand how the desire for sexual pleasure without procreation is somehow connected to eros.

The second way of reconciling Socrates' teaching with what we know about sexual desire is to fold the teaching of Aristophanes in *The Symposium* into that of Socrates. We saw that sex, on the Aristophanic view, is a means of sustaining our relationship with our other half. And that is important to us, in large part, because in our mutilated state we need someone else to care for and take care of us. There is some plausibility to this notion. However it too runs up both our experience and the text. For sometimes we seek sexual pleasure without any intention of creating a relationship of any kind with another person. That is, sometimes we just want to get laid. Moreover, this desire, which seems purely physical at first, is something Socrates seems to understand. For the next step in the ladder of love after the desire to have sex with one beautiful person is the desire to have sex with many beautiful people. The recognition of physical beauty in many people detaches us from the beautiful body of one person as we come to see the first person to whom we are sexually attracted as just one of many people whose appearance—whose faces and bodies and manner—stimulate our desires. Thus, on the second step up the ladder we become sexually promiscuous.

Some interpreters have thought that this second, promiscuous, step on the ladder of love is found in the text merely because it fit the formal structure of the ladder, the gradual movement from particular to general love. Yet the notion that the pursuit of sexual pleasure in itself is somehow essentially promiscuous is supported by a great deal of theory and, among those for whom sexual pleasure is, if only for a time, primary in their lives, practice. Freud, after all, held that the desire for sexual pleasure is not only promiscuous but polymorphously perverse. It extends not to just intercourse but to all kinds of activities in which two or more human beings rub their bodies against each other. And it is not uncommon for men and women who pursue sexual pleasure for its own sake to seek the most varied kinds of pleasure with the most diverse set of partners.

But why do we do that and other times not? Again we come back to the question of whether it is just a matter of the pursuit physical pleasure or is it somehow tied to the erotic desire to possess the good forever.

The second answer, I believe, is closer to the truth. And to see why, we have to recall the neo-Freudian argument I presented in the first essay, that human beings are at some deep level revolted by our bodies, or more accurately, at the vulnerability that comes with being embodied. To have a soul is to be able to imagine circumstances far beyond those which we see and hear and feel with our senses. To have a soul is to be able to imagine circumstances far different that those in which find ourselves. And thus to have a soul is to be have the capacity for anxiety not just, as animals do, about our immediate situation but about potential troubles near and far, including the death of our bodies, and perhaps the end of our existence entirely.

Platonic eros, the desire to possess the good forever, is possible because we can imagine both possessing the good forever and death the end of our capacity to possess the good at all. As we shall see in a minute, the upper steps on the ladder of love lead us to pursue activities of the soul that, we hope, will enable us to leave something behind when we die. But, on the lower steps, we pursue eros in another, indeed, almost opposite direction. We seek to still the anxiety that is the birthright of creatures with souls, not by living far beyond the present moment, but instead, by living entirely in the moment. We pursue sex with the hope of momentarily losing our selves or souls, and the anxiety that comes with having a self or soul, in a bodily pleasure so intense that nothing—no fears and no hopes—can distract us from that moment. And, when we come, we seem almost to lose the soul that experiences sexual pleasure, as the boundaries between our soul and the world around us are loosened and may for a brief but timeless moment, disappear. As the Chet Baker song puts it, we "get lost" in sexual love. It is no accident that the

French slang for orgasm is le petite mort, the little death. Sex at its best satisfies the erotic pursuit of eternity not when the soul attains eternal life but when it is stilled in sexual ecstasy.[8]

The first text in the Western tradition that understands the power of sexual pleasure to still the yearning for immortality is *The Iliad*. Interpreters of that text often look at Paris as his brother and fellow Trojans do, as someone who fails to live up to the ideal of a warrior. Few recognize that the life of Paris and Helen is an alternative solution to the problem of morality, a solution opposite to the warrior's quest for immortal glory. The warrior deals with mortality by seeking to overcome by means of winning eternal fame. The lover deals with mortality by accepting and embracing the opportunities for pleasure open only to those who are embodied. Warriors live in a world of men, and seek to win fame and glory by turning their heavily armored bodies into instruments of destruction and death. Male and female lovers lie nude and vulnerable to one another, becoming their bodies as they please each other. And it is Aphrodite, the goddess of love, who spirits Paris away from certain death at the hands of Menelaus and places him in his bedroom. And there, just moments after almost losing his life, Paris says that he never desired to make love to Helen more.

Sexual Love and Promiscuity

If at the lowest level on the ladder of love eros is expressed in our sexual life as a desire for the intense physical pleasure that reconciles us, if only for a time, to embodied life, than we can easily understand why move up to the next step on the ladder. We recognize the physical beauty of—and come to seek sexual pleasure—with many people. We become detached from the beautiful body of one person when we see him or her as just one of many people whose appearance—whose faces and bodies and manner—stimulate our desires. We thus become sexually promiscuous.

It is at this point that a key step up the ladder of love is made, that is, the movement from the pursuit of beauty of body to that of beauty of soul. This is a moment in the *Symposium* that is always overlooked. One suspects that readers of this work—and not just readers in the past—have been too ready to praise the pleasures of the soul and too quick to denigrate the pleasures of the body. And so they don't see that there is a serious question to be resolved here. Even if we accept the Socratic perspective and take the pleasures of the soul to be higher, finer, and better than the pleasures of the body—and we shall see that this claim is far more problematic than Socrates suggests—we still have the difficulty of understanding why someone in pursuit of the pleasures of the body with multiple partners would, all of a sudden, grasp the importance of the soul. That transformation is by no means easy or natural. Indeed, in the *Republic*, a similar transformation is said to require the most intense training over a number of years. How can we account, then, for this important moment in the *Symposium*?

Let me suggest, however, that Socrates' argument takes the pursuit of sexual pleasure seriously. As such, it recognizes that sex can be better or worse. And while beautiful bodies do elicit sexual desire, sex with beautiful bodies is not always the best sex. Sex with someone who has a beautiful soul is like to be more pleasurable. This is true even, perhaps especially, if we think of sex as primarily bodily in nature. A person with a good and beautiful soul is likely to be more open to our desires and his or her own, more capable of discovering new and different ways of giving and receiving pleasure, and more interested in pleasing us than a person with an bad and ugly soul. But that is not the whole story by any means. Sex is, as the speech of Aristophanes teaches us, not only or even primarily a means of gaining physical pleasure but also a means of creating, expressing, and sustaining a relationship between two people. The pursuit of

[8] Many people seek the same end, I believe, in the use of alcohol and recreational drugs. And some people—and especially those who find it more difficult to free themselves from soulful anxieties—use drugs as a way of making sexual pleasure possible. This is understandable but ultimately self-defeating. If you don't need alcohol or drugs to free yourself from anxiety or sexual inhibitions, sexual pleasure is more intense in their absence.

sexual pleasure for its own sake can make us aware that good sex can create a strong and attractive tie to another person. And thus it is an easy step to recognize that making such connections can be unpleasant or even dispiriting when we have sex with someone with a bad and ugly soul.

Or, to put the point another way, it is easier to lose ourselves intertwined in the arms and legs of a sexual partner with a good soul. And when we come back to ourselves, it is much more appealing to find ourselves with such a person as well.

My suggestion then is that the pursuit of sexual pleasure in sexual promiscuity is a critical way in which learn the importance of the soul, because it teaches us how important the souls of our sexual partners are to the satisfaction of our own bodily desires and reveals to us that pleasures of a more than sexual connection to another person. As we pursue sexual pleasure, and recognize the importance of the soul, we come to understand that sex can have a purpose beyond bodily pleasure, precisely to bring two souls together as one.

Thus it is precisely in the pursuit of bodily pleasure that we come to recognize the importance of a good soul. And, if we can recognize it, then the object of our erotic pursuits is transformed. We come to treasure beauty of soul rather than beauty of body.

Soul Love: Aristophanes vs Socrates

This would seem to take us to the point reached by men and women in Aristophanes' account of love. However, Socrates' view is, in important ways, different from that of Aristophanes. Whereas Aristophanes focuses on the love we have for another particular person, Socrates focus on the love we have for another person who instantiates a beauty of soul that draws us toward them. For Aristophanes, we seek our other half. For Socrates the person we seek is someone who is good in soul and body.

What accounts for this difference? Why might Socrates recommend this understanding of personal love to us?

The most common, and I think a correct way of understanding the difference between Socratic and Aristophanic love has been most clearly presented by Martha Nussbaum in *The Fragility of Goodness*. She suggests that Socrates' account of the love of two people is meant to show us a way around the impasse reached by Aristophanes. Socrates' way of thinking about intimate love helps us to deal with the difficulty of finding our other half while at the same time pointing us to a way in which we can transcend intimate love as the ultimate erotic goal of human beings.

It is, we have seen, likely to be very difficult or impossible find our other half. Yet there is more than one other person with a beautiful and good soul in the world. Our other half cares for us as we care for ourselves and that, initially might seem more important than the love we share with lover who has a good soul. Yet when lovers with beautiful and good souls find each other, they recognize and appreciate what they see in each other. They come to love each other for the qualities they have. And they presumably take care of each other for the same reason.

This way of understanding personal love is in keeping with a central theme in the thought of Plato and Aristotle, that the ideal human life is one that makes us less dependent on contingency and chance. While not taking the stories of the Gods seriously, Plato and Aristotle were struck, as any reader of *The Iliad* is today, by how the happiness of men and women is determined by the influence of the Gods on matters big and small and how what the Gods did was in turn determined not by any justice by their own whims and conflicts. So they were determined to find a path in life that enabled us to live as well as possible even when fortune and luck turns on us.

Loving the good and beautiful that we find in the souls of other people is thus seen by Nussbaum and others as an attempt to flea from the contingency and chance that determines whether we can find our other half. But there is, I think, another part of the story. Our view not just of personal love, but of the higher stages on the ladder of love will be one-sided if we don't acknowledge the attractiveness of seeing

beauty and goodness in the ones we love. For the larger Socratic point seems absolutely right to me: human beings have an aspiration—which is a critical way in which eros is expressed—to connect to something beyond ourselves, to an ideal that is not just our own but something to which others can aspire. We do want to find a way to give our lives—which from many perspectives seem all too short and lacking in significance—meaning and stature by living in light of some ideal of goodness and beauty that is worthy not just because it is good for us, but because it is good for human beings in general.

The Socratic understanding of personal love has often been questioned or criticized because it seems to leave something out, those particular qualities of the ones we love, qualities that might distinguish one good souled person from another. We may find a person's courage inspiring but we are also moved by the particular ways in which they stand fast against fear. We may be attracted by the wisdom of a person. But we are also attracted by the particular words and style a person uses in making her wisdom known. We may be attracted to a person who, as Aristotle would put if, finds a mean between buffoonery and seriousness. But we are also attracted to the special qualities of wit of the person we love. Where these preferences come from, we usually do not know. We have to turn to Freudian considerations, to the impact that our parents and others have had on our lives to understand these preferences. No matter why, that we love people as individuals with their own particular way of being, and not just as exemplars of beauty and goodness, is as plain as can be.

I don't know that Socrates (or Plato) really mean us to forget entirely about those particular qualities. Rather part of their point is to show us, first, that if we are ready to give up the focus on those particular qualities, then we can find a kind of erotic love of another person that escapes some of the limitations of Aristophanic love, that is, the difficulty of finding the one single person who is our other half. And, second, Socrates means to show us that, if we ourselves have good souls, the particular qualities we treasure in our lovers are not just attractive in their own sake but because they are infused with a more abstract ideal.

That is a point worth very much worth understanding about love, if only because to the extent we—and our other half—fall short of the ideal, we may actually be better off if we don't pursue someone exactly like us. After all, no one with any sense loves everything about himself. If eros leads us to aspire to be with someone better than ourselves in one or another way, we may better than if we find the one person who best matches us.[9]

Still, even after we understand the deeper aspiration that lead us to love someone for the good and beauty of their souls, it is hard not to feel that a love based on the general qualities our lover instantiates is some kind of compromise, albeit one that, given the difficulty of finding our other half, is hard for us to avoid if we want to love and be loved at all. Socrates then moves on to give us another reason to accept that compromise. For on the Socratic account of eros, our love for another person leads us to procreate, that is, to have a child, something we wish to do when we come to love a good-souled person. And our aim is not the mere physical begetting of a child but the creation of a human being who possesses a beautiful soul, presumably like our own.[10] So, at this point on the ladder of love physical and spiritual pleasure are conjoined both in terms of the desires that move us and that which we create as a result of those desires: "…if he meets a beautiful, generous, and naturally gifted soul, he cleaves strongly to the two (body and soul) together."[11]

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[9] We all know people who have become better, or worse, because they love one person rather than another. I sometimes think that the most important lesson I can pass on to my daughter is that loving a good person makes us better person. And vice versa. How does one impart such a lesson, though? I suppose only by being as good as I can be myself.

[10] There is no question that we human beings like our children in part because we see ourselves in them. The pleasure of having a child who shares one's spiritual or psychological qualities is far greater than that of having a child who merely looks like us.

[11] 209b.

The procreation of a child is, in an unusual way, both particular and general. Parents come to love the particular qualities of their own children. And yet the desire to have a child is not the desire to have a particular child—we can't, after all, pick and choose the child whom we are bound to love. Lovers want to have a child because it something they can create together that is likely to survive them. Our child is, like the other half we seek, a person who is our own. But while our child is a particular individual, we parents try to create and mold that child in light of our general ideals.

When lovers produce a child they are thus taking another, large step beyond Aristophanic love. Lovers who produce children, express their love not just in their concern for one another, but in their mutual concern for their child. And that concern for a child may help lovers who are not entirely one with one another—who are not really each other's missing half—to stay together. After all, to have a child is already to be prepared to sacrifice oneself and one's own concerns. And so an erotic relationship we have with someone that is not focused on the relationship itself, but on what we produce together, has a chance of surviving in the face of the compromises we might make when we can't actually find our other half but settle for loving a person with a good soul.

Love and Politics

Intimate love seems to further transcends itself at the next level on the ladder of love. Just as the appreciation of physical beauty in one person leads to an appreciation of physical beauty in many people, Socrates tells us that much the same happens with regard to beauty of soul. Recognizing the beauty of a single soul soon leads us to recognize the beauty of many souls and also the beauty of souls working together. And what beautiful souls produce together is a good communal life, presented in the speech of Socrates as the attempt to create good institutions and laws.[12] So someone who moves up to the next step on the ladder of love is motivated not to procreate individual children but to create political communities of people that, in so far as possible, live up to his or her ideal of a political community.

Laws are phenomena created by souls but realized in our bodily actions. So, at this leve, procreation in light of beauty involves both elements of our nature.

What explains this transition from love of our partners and children to love of the broader political community? Here again, there seem to be two possible explanations. The first is that the transition to love of the political community from love of one's own partner and child is another step towards freeing ourselves from contingency and chance. So much remains uncertain when it comes to the life of love and procreation: whether we can find a person with a good soul with whom to procreate, whether we can have children, and whether our children (or grand children) survive us. When, on the other hand, our object of concern is the whole political community, that which we love is not so subject to chance. We can have more confidence that our political community will survive us than our own family. And the creation of good laws would seem to be a collective product in which the need for an intimate relationship with other human beings, our lovers or children, have been transcended. Indeed, a reading of the *Republic* prepares us for this conclusion since Socrates suggests that all intimate ties must be extirpated in the ideal polis.

There may be something to the notion that the transition from love of another and one's child to love of one's political community is a further step away from the contingency of life and love. As Socrates points out, procreation of real or metaphorical children can be stimulated not just by the presence

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[12] It is important to note Plato is not talking about politics as we know it. For the Greeks politics encompassed much of what we today would call social as opposed to political interaction. Politics for the Greeks involved, as Aristotle put it ruling and being ruled in turn in all those areas where human beings work together to secure a common good. So to talk about political activity is, for us, to talk about much that occurs in the non-profit sector—in, say, hospitals and universities—and in large businesses.

but by the "memory" of those we love. "Whether [the lover] is present or absent, he holds the beautiful one in memory, nurtures with him that which has been generated in common."[13] So, even if we lose our partners in the procreation of good souls, we can continue to find inspiration from them. And even if we never find a partner who entirely suits us, we may be inspired by people, perhaps even people in the distant past, whose achievements and ideals inspire us. This, of course, is true only with regard to goods of the soul—and especially good communities. For these goods can be inspired by the connections we establish to people long dead.

So the political life is, in some ways, a further step away from the contingency of finding personal love. However, when we stop to think about it for a moment, the notion that what we accomplish politically is somehow less subject to things beyond our control than what happens to our relationships with our lovers and children is a little questionable. Good laws and institutions are not created without political power after all. And the pursuit and exercise of political power is about as contingent and chancy a way of life that most of us can imagine.

In addition, nowhere in *The Symposium* does Socrates suggest that political life is one which we leave intimate relationships behind. Rather he says that those who love the soul of another are motivated to give birth to offspring such as beautiful deeds and good laws. Eros, I want to suggest, leads the best men and women to work together to shape a polis not so much as an escape from contingency and chance, but because such people want, much more than others, to live in light of ideals that transcend themselves. They want, with dedication and passion, to make their mark on their time and place. And so they take the chance of entering the political life, knowing that failure is as likely as success, and hoping that, at the very least, a magnificent failure might inspire others to follow in their path.

And in doing this, I would suggest, erotic politicians do not flee from intimate ties with others. Just as lovers at a lower rung of the ladder are lead to procreate children by their ties to one another and their desire to produce something together, lovers at another level are lead to procreate things of the soul—a good community—in large part by their ties to one another. Socrates gives examples of great men whose individual achievements he honors—Solon, and Lycurgus, Homer and Hesiod. Yet he suggests that these achievements are "children" that these individuals "have in common" with another.[14]

Great leaders, and especially the great legislators who found or transform political communities, do work in common with the broad range of their followers, whose souls they enlarge and ideals they shape. But there is a suggestion in the text that the work they do is also nourished by intimate ties with particular other people. If we stop and think for a moment, the reasons these intimate ties are so important will be obvious. The procreation of good communities is easier when we work with particular others who share, inspire and help us seek to realize our vision of a good political community. The political life is, contrary to the view held by some previous interpreters of the text, actually very hard, especially when one seeks not just to hold office or maintain the status quo but, like the great legislators of the past, to found a new way of life or radically renew an old one. In the Greek tradition, great legislators often come from outside their political community and bring a new vision to it. They thus act (almost) alone and, one imagines, cannot wholly share their ideals and aspirations with others, even most of their own followers. Thus to have a partner with whom to share and examine one's ideals and strategies and to whom one can confide one's hopes and fears is likely to be critically important. And if that partner could understand one so well that they can extend one's reach in one's political community —and protect one's back—then he or she will be incredibly valuable.

As Socrates understands intimate love, its purpose is not, and cannot be, to restore a unity that the Gods have sundered. Socrates cannot point to a way in which we can overcome our mutilated state. There is no such way. We cannot restore a unity of body and soul that gave us the strength to challenge the

[13] 209c
[14] 209c

gods. So we must find another way to possess the good forever. If intimate love is focused not on the concrete attributes of our lover but, rather, on the attainments in the world that are stimulated and made possible by intimate love, then our inability to find our other half is less troublesome. For a love that is focused outwards on politics enables us to produce a unity of purpose between two people that, I shall suggest below, is attainable in only one other way, the life of philosophy. Lovers at one step on the ladder of love are held together not by the perfect symbiosis that occurs when we find our other half, but by what they have created together, their children. Lovers at a higher step are bound together by what they attempt to accomplish in the realm of politics. And this too binds people together who might not be perfectly sympathetic to one another but have become one through shared and mutual effort.

Or, to put the point another way: when we are looking for our other half, we are searching for someone who is already one with us. On the other hand, a, possibly imperfect, love of another person with a good soul, becomes stronger and more intimate as one works with that person to procreate either children or laws. Procreation, after all, is also self-creation. No one knows how to be a parent or a politician before they begin those adventures—and you certainly can't learn them by reading a book. Rather the expression of eros in either or these directions transforms one in ways that it is difficult to imagine at the beginning of one's journey. And when two people take part in that transformation, if things go well (if they were good people to begin with), they are likely to come to share not only broad ideals but particular ways of expressing those ideals. A life lived together in pursuit of general ideals is likely to create a shared and particular way of expressing those ideals. The result is not that two people find in each other their other half but that two people, who presumably were already in some ways sympathetic to one another, *become* their other half by working together.[15]

Where is sex in the intimate ties between those who produce good communities? Perhaps it drops out entirely. Socrates does not encourage us to think of political partners as seeking to make love to one another. And the movement up the ladder of love is generally understood as on in which sexual desires gradually becomes much less important. Yet as we saw above, once we learn to appreciate good souls as well as good bodies, a central purpose of sexual pleasure is to knit two souls together. So wouldn't a sexual relationship become part of an intimate relationship between political allies?[16] [17] We will see more

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[15] My discussion of the political life clearly goes beyond the text although I think it is suggested by parts of the text—and even more by reading back what we learn later about the importance of intimate ties in the philosophic life and political life. The account that I give is also influenced by my long term interest in what you might call political partnerships. There is an interesting literature on such partnership and, having read a good deal of it, I am continually strong by how incredibly strong relationships can be and how important they are to people who live the political life, both when they go well and when they go badly. Among many other works see, Alexander George, *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House*, Theodore Sorenson, *Kennedy;* Samuel Rosenman, *Working with Roosevelt;* Robert Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins;* Richard Brookhiser, *Alexander Hamilton, American* and other standard biographies of Hamilton for his relationship with George Washington, and biographies of Jefferson and Madison for their relationship.

[16]Someone who has spent any time in a political campaign may laugh here and point out that of course politics and sex goes together. Most political campaigns of are sexual hot houses of one kind or another, especially on the young people who volunteer for them. Of course relationships between campaign workers are—usually—very far from the kind of intimate relationship I am talking about here. More typically, men and women under a great deal of stress, and spurred on by the hormonal rush that comes with the adrenaline high that makes 20 hour days possible, turn to each in search of a moment's respite from the campaign or relief from the day to day anxiety or help in getting some sleep. Sometimes it seems like more, particularly when two anxious people find that they can help and support one another through a difficult time. But those relationships tend to fade quickly when the practical need for each other is gone. Once in a while, however people do find the kind of intimate connection I'm talking about here in a political campaign. (In footnote 18 I try to say a bit more about the contemporary circumstances under which people who work together do find themselves falling in love.)

[17] In ancient Greek sexual relationships between men who were to some extent political allies was quite common. See, Kenneth J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*. Homoerotic relationships among American politicians are,

about why that might occur as we now turn from the political life to the philosophic life. For the importance of intimate relationships—and of sexual pleasure—among those who pursue political goods becomes even more evident in the next step up the ladder.[18]

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despite some suggestions about Abraham Lincoln, pretty much unknown. However, a Freudian could have a field day exploring the implications of the rampant womanizing among President Kennedy and some of his closest staff members.

[18]If we remember that what Plato takes to be political activity encompasses spheres of life beyond what we call politics today, then the role of intimate relationships among people who work together in politics is fairly obvious to see. The entry of women into the middle class working world—a world of more or less political activity as the Greeks understand politics—has led to an upsurge in romantic relationships between men and women at work. In many cases, I suspect, men and women are drawn together by working closely together in ways that are similar to those I have discussed in this section. This is likely to lead to a very different kind of romantic relationships than men and women have had in the past. Romantic love as we have known in it the West is typically relationship similar to those that are lower on the ladder of love, in which they main focus of each partner in the relationship is on each other and perhaps eventually or on their children. A relationship based on shared experience at work is likely to very different. It will be very interesting to see how romantic relationships at work develop and how and to what extent that changes both work and romantic love.

Another related phenomenon is that these new kinds of relationships at work have lead to the breakup of marriages. Now the break up of marriages due to extramarital affairs at work is not a new phenomenon. Men have often used their status at work and economic well being to entice women into affairs, and most often they have been younger women of a lower status. It is hard not to be troubled by these relationships when they seem to result from the pursuit of "trophy wives" on the part of men. (By the way, the first two speeches of *The Symposium*, by Phaedrus and Pausanias, are wonderful explorations of unequal relationships between older and younger men. Their discussion of the implicit trade of sexual favors for power and wealth in such relationships are all too reminiscent of the kind of relationship between older men and younger women we have been discussing.)

When, however, men *and women* leave their spouses to form relationships with co-workers who are roughly of the same age and status, we are talking about a very different phenomenon. People, and especially children, get hurt when marriages break up for whatever reason. But what is really poignant about this phenomenon is that, from a Platonic point of view, these marital breakdowns frequently occur because of a tension between two different kinds of relationships that are, in their own way, good and admirable. Imagine a happily married woman in her forties of fifties who finds herself absorbed and increasingly devoted to a fulfilling career, and then falls in love with a co-worker who shares her passion and dedication to work. There may have been nothing at all wrong with her marriage except that, as her children got older and began to go off on their own, she found less and less to share in her life with her husband. And yet she still may have cared deeply for her husband, and shared with him memories and friends and a home and an ongoing relationship with their children. But, at work, she and a co-worker share something that is of great importance to her. He stimulates and inspires her to be even better at what she does—as she does for him. And, perhaps for the first time in her life, she feels that some of her deepest aspirations are understood and appreciated and supported by another person.

It is hard, from the point of view of *The Symposium*, not to see this kind of relationship in a favorable light. Yet the cost of breaking up a marriage to enter into such a relationship is bound to be severe. To be torn between two loves is always tragic but perhaps is even more so when person is torn not just between two lovers, but between two different and essentially incommensurable kinds of love.

One outcome for office relationships that leaves marriages intact is for men and women at work to forge deep and on-going friendships. People sometimes talk of their "office husband" or "office wife." In a society where sexual fidelity is seen as the touchstone of a strong marriage, these relationships may have some sexual charge but have to remain mostly non-sexual so as not to threaten the "real marriages." That is a line easier to maintain when clear boundaries exist between time spent at work and time at home. In such cases office marriages may continue indefinitely without posing any threat to the "real" marriage. But in fields where the distinction between time at work and after work are more porous or when one of the partners in an office marriage is not himself or herself married, these friendships are more likely to cross the boundaries that keep them safe, both for the marriage of the married partner in an office marriage and for the well being of the unmarried partner who is more liable to be vulnerable to forming hopes or expectations that are eventually frustrated.

Philosophy

In climbing that next step we are ultimately drawn forward not by beauty of body or beauty of soul but by beauty itself. Now we procreate in light of the Platonic form of beauty and we are led by it to contemplate, speak, and perhaps write about that which is most permanent. Eros ultimately leads us, then, to philosophy, the love of wisdom.[19] Again the transformation of eros as we move from one level to another is clear. We move up the ladder of love in part to escape the imperfections and impermanence of good laws that lead us to pursue knowledge of that which is prefect and everlasting. And we move up the ladder once more because of our capacity to imagine regimes—and worlds—that transcend in beauty any we hope to create or find leads us to seek to create them in logos—in words, speech, reason.

In discussing the advantages of this pursuit of beauty itself, initially the importance of our attachment to one other person fades away. On the traditional view of the *Symposium*, the great advantage

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I have not been able to find any sociological studies that explore this phenomenon—and can't think of any films or novels that explore it either. Yet many of us have had relationships with people at work with whom we have formed close friendships that, under other circumstances, might have become something more. And many of us know of relationships at work that have threatened or ended marriages. My sense is that this kind of relationships is becoming much more common every year.

As they become more common, I wonder if office marriages might begin to change our understanding of marriage. It is hard to know whether polyamorous relationships, in which people have secondary erotic relationships in addition to their primary relationships, have become more common in recent years although they have certainly gotten more attention (including a TV series, *Big Love*, about polygamy.) Some polyamorous relationships are no more than an opportunity for people to add secondary, ongoing sexual relationships to their lives—an alternative to taking part in sex parties with a changing cast of characters. But some polyamorous relationships develop when people find that cannot find all that they seek in an erotic relationship with one other person. In the interesting concluding essay of his book *Thick and Thin*, Michael Walzer points out the very notion of a single unitary self is coming undone in a world in which we play so many different roles in so many spheres of life. Perhaps the notion of single unitary marriage will also come undone. And yet, anyone who is married or part of couple knows that it is hard enough to manage one relationship today. The idea of easily managing more than one serious relationship at a time seems daunting. Even if we could leave sexual jealousy aside, how would we find time to make all the necessary decisions about who stays with whom when and what happens on holidays and vacations? And the lack of time is bound to be an even deeper problem. Or will erotic relationships of a partial kind develop in which people are willing to limit their expectations of spending time with one another? Men and women have had affairs since companionate marriage was first invented and there is no reason to think that they have ever been easy to manage. Yet people keep having affairs not least because in this complicated life we live it is sometimes hard for us to find everything we seek in our erotic lives with just one person. Will we then learn to manage plural relationships in the future? I have some doubts but, as I look at the changing world of work and marriage, I wonder if a dramatic change in how we understand marriage is not somewhere in our future.

I shall leave these questions here and simply note that this discussion is an example of a theme that, as we shall see below, is central to *The Symposium*, the difficulty of reconciling the various kinds of erotic relationships with one another. If, as I think, *The Symposium* leaves a careful reader with a vision of a perfect love in which all the kinds of erotic relationships discussed in the speeches of Aristophanes and Socrates are found together, it also leaves us with the thought that this prefect love is going to be something that is for practical if no other reasons, if not impossible, than quite rare.

[19] I will not make much of it here, but I do want to note that philosophy in the *Symposium,* unlike philosophy in *The Republic,* has an aesthetic dimension to it. In understanding this point, it is important to remember that Plato did not write treaties but dialogues, a wonderful genre that combines poetry and prose, drama and discourse. And whatever else it is, philosophy for Plato is certainly not an academic discipline. *The Republic* emphasizes the way in which philosophy discovers the word around us. *The Symposium* emphasizes the creative, constructive side of philosophy. I would argue that when Plato talks about philosophy he is also talking about the arts in their highest, philosophic form. Or rather, he is pointing to the way in which the invention characteristic of art is as critical to the pursuit of wisdom as is the discovery that we take to be central to philosophy today. Philosophy, in other words, discovers and creates at the same time.

of the philosophic life is that it is something we can do alone. We do not need others to help us. And, perhaps most importantly, we do not need sex. Indeed, on the traditional interpretation, the pursuit of sexual pleasure is something that can only pull us down the ladder.

And yet, immediately after discussing this highest form of erotics, Socrates says something that profoundly calls the traditional interpretation into question. He says that he will "urge on the rest" to follow his path up the ladder. If the advantage of the philosophic life is that we can be alone, why is it important to Socrates to urge philosophy on others?

The answer to this question is connected to the advantages of the philosophic life itself. Why is this form of life higher? And what is the importance to us of procreating in light of a beauty that is eternal and wholly beautiful? We have already seen one answer: the greatest beauty is that which is without imperfection and which is not subject to decay. And what we produce when stimulated by beauty itself is potentially immortal in a way that institutions and laws are not.[20]

Another answer is that the life of philosophy is one that, to a large extent, takes us beyond the struggles of human life. Philosophy is the one kind of procreation that, at least in some respects, transcends the struggle over limited goods.[21] It relieves the tensions between human beings that seem intrinsic to our lives. The good of philosophy is unlimited. There is enough for everyone. We teachers do not lose wisdom if we are so lucky to pass some on to our students. And the tensions between human beings in philosophy are fruitful. In the pursuit of knowledge we seek out people who present powerful alternatives to our own views. No one can teach us more or stimulate us to do better than the person who radically disagrees with us

Indeed philosophic friendship overcomes to an even higher degree the difficulties of finding our other half. The imperfections of our partners in pursuit of philosophy are less important when we are focused on what we create together than on what we each are. And that is especially true when what we create together is a good that is essentially limitless as opposed to the more limited goods of good political communities. Philosophy, in a way, partly reinstates the element of promiscuity that was given up in the transition from body to soul. We can benefit from having more than one partner in the pursuit of knowledge.

While the philosophic life, for Socrates, opens up the possibility of a promiscuous series of attachments to the various friends with whom we pursue wisdom, that possibility again becomes questionable when we ask ourselves whether we, too, can follow Socrates.

CAN WE FOLLOW THE SOCRATIC VISION?

The Socratic vision of the pursuit of philosophy—a pursuit of the one good that is available to and can be shared by all and a pursuit that thrives not just on mutual confirmation but on conflict as well—is quite a wonderful vision. Yet the question of whether it is open to any of us still remains. Can any of us live on the highest rung of the ladder of love? The trouble is that we are not pure souls but embodied beings. We have to care for our bodies. We need material resources in order to live. (We need teaching jobs and grants to philosophize.) We need to reproduce physically so that there are people to teach and learn from and people to read our books. And we also have sexual desires that hold us back from moving up the ladder. Sexual satisfaction may, as Aristophanes suggests, free us from the need for

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[20] Perhaps plays and poems are immortal only to the extent that they have a philosophic dimension. For it is that which makes them available to people in different times and places.

[21] The struggle over limited goods is not wholly transcended because, even if we devote ourselves to the philosophic life, we still need resources to stay alive and have the time to philosophize. Of course, if we find our happiness in philosophy, we will not need as many resources as we would if we found our happiness in other pursuits.

constant contact with our other half. It may, as Socrates suggests, be a way of joining souls together. But the pursuit of bodily pleasure has an independent life as well.

It is likely that the desire for bodily pleasure will be weakened when we move up the ladder of love. When eros is focused on physical beauty or even on the beauty of a single soul, sexual desire is heightened. After all, we know we are really in love with someone when we want to have sex again and again with him or her—as opposed to having sex with many different people.[22] Once this kind of personal attachment is weakened, once we pursue good laws and philosophic wisdom itself, sexual desire may weaken.

But there is no reason to think that sexual desire will disappear.

Indeed, if we ask why eros starts at the lowest levels of the ladder of love, the answer is simply that bodies have needs that must be satisfied. Souls develop later than bodies. The physical pleasures are more immediately attractive than the pleasures of the soul. It requires time and patience to learn to appreciate the goods of the soul. Even if it is true that time and patience can also heighten our bodily pleasures, sex has a charm that immediately obvious to everyone.

In addition, as we saw above, sexual pleasure satisfies the erotic desire to possess the good forever in ways that is different from romantic love, or political activity or philosophy. While the reconciliation with our bodies and mortality that we get from good sex is in some ways the opposite of the pursuit of immortality in political activity or philosophy, there is no reason to think that, at different times, human beings might not find both ways of satisfying eros attractive. We are not simple creatures after all, and, as Aristotle recognizes, some change of pace from our pursuit of the highest good is necessary from time to time.

SOCRATES IS STRANGE

So I see nothing in the text that would lead us to conclude that human beings at the highest run of the ladder of love would give up sex entirely—or at all. We do have bodies as well as souls. But that raises the deeper question of what kind of sexual life might we pursue? And, much more importantly, when we reach the highest rung on the ladder of love, what becomes of our intimate relationships, the forms of love that essentially involve one other person? We saw above that intimate, personal love is still important in the political life. But does it play a role in the lives of philosophers? A moment ago I suggested that philosophers are likely to be promiscuous in their attachment to other philosophers. Does that go for their sexual lives as well?

One reason to have our doubts comes to mind when we think about Aristophanes' account of love and recall that it originates in part because of the weakness of our bodies. Life is difficult we saw, and we need help in getting through. Lovers who create a family are there to support one another. In a different way, so are lovers who are allies in politics. But who is there to support philosophers?

And that thought leads to another one. We are further pushed to wonder about what a life of philosophy would be for us when we reflect on what we learn from Alcibiades about the special nature of Socrates. For by the end of *The Symposium*, it is not at all clear that Socrates is anything like us at all. In particular, we are lead by the speech of Alcibiades, and the action of the *Symposium*, to wonder whether Socrates has the bodily desires of other human beings. As Alcibiades tells us: On military campaigns Socrates needs neither food nor shelter. He is immune to cold. He can drink without getting drunk. He can go without sleep. And, most importantly, he is immune to the beauty of Alcibiades.

We learn all this from the entrancing yet disturbing story Alcibiades tells us about his pursuit of Socrates. Filled with the madness for another that both Aristophanes and Socrates say is central to love

[22] I make this point about eros and sexual desire at greater length in the first essay in this book.

for another person, Alcibiades initially seeks to be eromenos or beloved to Socrates. He encourages the presumably shy Socrates to be his lover or erastes. Later, Alcibiades pursues Socrates with such passion that he has become the erastes or lover. In both poses, Alcibiades comes to understand a deep secret: Socrates is strange. He does not have any of the normal physical desires of human beings. And most especially, he does not have the sexual desires of other men. Alcibiades discovers this when he first wrestles with and later embraces Socrates. It is not so much that Socrates does not want to have sex with him. Certainly on the traditional interpretation of the text, we would expect that Socrates would be able restrain his sexual desires. And, as some interpreters have suggested, doing so would show us what Socrates tells us, that the goods of the soul are worth far more than the goods of the body.[23] What Alcibiades discovers, however, is not that Socrates restrains himself. When he embraces Socrates and perhaps looks down his toga or feels Socrates' body against his own Alcibiades discovers that Socrates is not sexually aroused at all.

Now if Socrates is that different from the rest of us, we can well understand why his vision of eros as leading in its highest form to philosophy fits him. But does it fit us? To answer that question we have to know whether Socrates' strangeness preceded his attaining the highest reaches of love or whether it is, instead, a product of his proceeding up the ladder of love. If it is the result of Socrates moving up from one stage to another and then to the highest point of philosophy, then the path is difficult but not unattainable for the rest of us. If, however, Socrates was always a bit different, then at best we can only partially attain the highest form of erotic expression.

The text strongly suggests that Socrates was always different because he always lacked our bodily desires. Indeed, the peculiarity of a naïve and ignorant Socrates learning from Diotima about eros suggests precisely this. Diotima has to take him through every basic element of love. And it is not just, or even primarily, the last stage in the procession up the ladder of love that seems new to Socrates. Socrates is perplexed each step of the way, just as someone would be who was a stranger to human desires, especially those of the body.

Socrates, then, seems to be a man almost without a body. Even more, throughout his interchange with Diotima and his relationship with Alcibiades he seems rather unerotic in any conventional sense. At the very least his eros is not expressed in bodily terms. His well known ugliness also leads us to see him in this light. And, of course, this is not a new picture of Socrates. In the *Republic*, too, Socrates seems to depreciate the importance of eros, especially but not only in its lowest forms

WHY DOES SOCRATES PHILOSOPHIZE?

If Socrates is different from us, then we need to understand how and why philosophy appeals to him. For, if he is not erotic in anything like the conventional sense, there is little reason to doubt that Socrates love of wisdom is connected to something like the erotic desires to possess the good forever.

One possible suggestion is that Socrates is somehow like the unmutilated human beings before they challenged the Gods. Socrates is at least partly unmangled. Though he looks like us, his body is as strong as that of human beings before we were split in two. Has Socrates, despite all physical evidence to the contrary, not been sliced in too? Is he whole in a way we are not?

One reason to think so is that Socrates' erotic desires seem similar to those that human beings with two faces, four arms and four legs would have. Because those unmutilated human beings contain both halves of a whole they, like Socrates, have no erotic attachments to other individuals Rather, their eros is, like that of Socrates directed to goods in general and, presumably, most of all to wisdom.

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[23] As Allan Bloom points, this is precisely the point of Socrates saying that it would be unfair for him to trade his wisdom for Alcibiades good looks, p. 162

Socrates, in other words, is the same and different from us. However, he is different enough that his way of life not one that we can wholly follow. We can pursue philosophy, but only for a time. For we have bodily desires that lead us to seek the comfort and protection of those we love; we have sexual desires that are important to us in for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is their role in creating and sustaining a relationship with someone we love. And, because he has no real need for intimate attachments, Socrates can pursue philosophy promiscuously, attaching himself for a time to many partners. Because we do need intimate connections, we cannot pursue philosophy in quite that promiscuous a fashion.

PROCREATION IN BEAUTY REQUIRES PARTNERS

But perhaps there is a further complication: Maybe Socrates can't actually do without other human beings either. After all, Socrates spends his time in the company of others. And, more than that, Socrates pretends to have erotic interests in the young men with whom he associates. If I am correct in doubting that Socrates has any sexual interest in these young, we need to understand not only why he feigns such interest but why he hangs around them at all.

Once again a comparison with pre-apocalyptic human beings helps us understand what is going on. Aristophanes points out that before we were split in two, we human beings were capable of procreating, although the process was closer to the sexual practice of frogs than that of post-apocalyptic human beings. If we think more about the picture Aristophanes gives us of pre-apocalyptic human beings who have two faces, we will recognize that we were once creatures who could converse with ourselves. Unmangled human beings, in other words could philosophize all by ourselves. Thus the power of human beings before we were divided in two is not just physical but spiritual. It is the power of dialogue, embodied in one person.[24]

Socrates may be as strong physically as unmutilated human beings but he is not all powerful. He still needs politics, and not just to protect himself. More importantly, Socrates has only one head and mouth. He needs to converse with his friends to philosophize. Indeed, in the *Apology* he says that he won't leave Athens to avoid condemnation because the philosophic life is impossible if he cannot talk to his fellow citizens. As the Socratic dialogues teach us, philosophy is best practiced by means of debate and discussion. We need the challenge of conversation with those who disagree with us in order to deepen and test our own views.

If that were the whole story of why Socrates—and presumably we—need conversation in order to philosophize than there is no reason, except the weakness of our bodies that philosophers need intimate ties to other. It seems, however, that Socrates and we both need conversation of a particular kind, intimate conversation in which we reveal our selves to one another. Socratic wisdom is most emphatically wisdom about our own nature. Above the Temple of Apollo is the motto "Know Thyself." The pursuit of philosophy which is guided by the form of beauty itself may give us knowledge of human beings in general. But we can't fully know human beings in general unless we know human beings in particular. And we can't know human beings in particular if we don't come to know the one individual human being closest to us—ourselves.

To know ourselves intimately we have to know others intimately as well. We have to compare our own deepest desires to those of other people. And we have to see ourselves reflected in the eyes of

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[24] Of course, we can talk to ourselves—and thus philosophize by ourselves—now. We don't lose that capacity when we are split in two. But the notion that we once had two faces—two mouths, ears, and eyes—even though we had once soul suggests the possibility that we once better able to bring different perspectives and ideas to bear in our conversations with ourselves. And perhaps our greater physical power also enabled us to more easily face the truth about ourselves, since human defensiveness and self-deception clearly is tied to our various weaknesses in the face of life.

others to be sure we know who we really are. Philosophy requires conversation and philosophic thinking about those things that are most important to us. It requires discussions in which we explore those parts of ourselves that are so important and hard to know precisely because they are so central to know who we are. And while some philosophical conversations we can have with almost anyone, others require the intimate knowledge that only occurs between people who know each other well.[25] Pre-apocalyptic human beings who could talk to themselves could therefore know themselves without close contact with other particular human beings. We, however, cannot.

Surely the point the text makes is deeply true. Socrates may or may not have sex with his friends. But to the extent that he wishes to understand the human condition, he has to understand the most intimate desires of human beings. Socrates sometimes contemplates by himself. Perhaps he can understand what is in the sky and below the earth by himself.[26] But though he can contemplate by himself, he does not just stay by himself. To understand human life he has to partake in it. At the very least, he has to become the confidant of his friends. Perhaps he has to become their lovers or at least act like an erastes or eromenos around them so that they reveal their desires to him.

Moreover, the text shows us clearly that sex is a path to knowledge of one another. Early in the text, Agathon tells Socrates to come sit near him so that he can learn from the touch of Socrates. Socrates jokingly responds that we can't learn something in this way. Yet the text shows us that we can. It is in touching Socrates that Alcibiades learns something terribly important about him. And, as we have seen, the importance of the soul is learned by engaging in somewhat promiscuous sex with people who have beautiful bodies.

It is not just that we need physical contact with others just to learn about ourselves—we have seen that human beings have other reasons to seek sex. Of course, sex and philosophy may not be so easy to prise apart. Sartre is reputed to have said that never really knew a woman until he had slept with her. I always thought this one of the great pickup lines of all time. But, perhaps what makes it so good is that there is a good deal of truth to it. One reason we want to sleep with others—one source of infidelity that is too little remarked upon—is the desire to know and be known by another—and by more than one other. What I'm tempted to call epistemic sex—sex in the pursuit of knowledge and self-knowledge—is perhaps more central to us than we usually recognize.

During the speech of Alcibiades we see Socrates upset and discombobulated. There are few if any other places in the Platonic corpus where we see him so out of sorts. By now, the reason for this should be clear. Socrates' cover has been blown. His erotic interest in the young men who follow him around has been revealed as a pretense. And, for a moment Socrates seems like a lonely figure. And we can well understand why, prior to meeting with Diotima, Socrates lacked knowledge of erotics. At the end of the *Symposium* Socrates seems to be a man who is incapable of forming real intimate ties, not just because he lacks sexual desire but because he can't fully reveal himself to others. His irony is a protective device that preserves the secret of his strangeness from others. Yet it is also a device that distances himself from others.

Perhaps we see Socrates in this way only because we project our own hopes and desires on to him. We desire to be known and loved by particular others and we see that Socrates may have no need or capacity for this. Perhaps Socrates can make do with a simulacrum of intimacy. Or a pre-apocalyptic human being can know himself because he can talk to himself. We, in our weakness and vulnerability, and with individual and distinct souls, cannot. We need another person who cares for us as we care for ourselves; who will be there for us when we are troubled or ill; and who can tell us when we are not making sense to ourselves or others. We need that, as we have seen in our political partnerships. And we

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[25] Another reason intimate knowledge cannot be shared promiscuously is that tensions between human beings are too great for us to comfortably let everyone know who we are.

[26] Still, we know from *the Apology* that Socrates reads the books of natural philosophers.

need it as much in our philosophical partnerships. Indeed, given that philosophy, like politics, is a commitment to taking a long path to an uncertain end, some promise of permanence in our relationships seems vital as well.

SOCRATES AND ALCIBIADES (AND US)

In different ways, Nussbaum, Bloom, and Rosen have all suggested that the Symposium points us to the problem of understanding how and why Alcibiades went off the rails. Nussbaum's intriguing suggestion is that *the Symposium* takes place on the night Alcibiades profaned the Eleusinian mysteries and smashed the statues of Hermes with their erect phalluses. All three interpreters suggest that the events of the *Symposium*—and those recounted within—show us that what drives Alcibiades to despair is his relationship with Socrates.

They suggest that Alcibiades' all too human desires for intimate and political connection with others makes the life of Socrates, the life lived in pursuit of an abstract good, impossible for him. For that life is only open to Socrates, the one person who lacks the physical weaknesses and desires the rest of us share.

With this conclusion I concur. But I would suggest that what troubles Alcibiades is not just that he can't have Socrates. The trouble is that, for the first time, Alcibiades recognizes that the wholeness he desires, the good he seeks, is beyond him. Alcibiades, whose outsized ambition in all things suggests that he may be one of the most erotic men who have ever lived, is not satisfied with his political achievements. He is not even satisfied in seeking philosophic wisdom. He wants it all. It is not clear to me whether what Alciabides seeks is the independence from love of another that Socrates seems to possess or whether he seeks to combine the various erotic goods with an intimate relationship with the one person who seems to him to best exemplify the goodness he hopes to capture, Socrates. Perhaps Alcbiades does not really know himself. It does not matter. For both Socrates and the Socratic life of philosophy are unavailable to him.

Socrates is not available to Alcibiades because of his strangeness, because he does not share in the erotic desires of most human beings. And thus Alcibiades can not to form the kinds of intimate connection he seeks from Socrates. And the Socratic life is not available to Alcibiades because he, unlike Socrates, does need others in many different ways.

In reading the speech of Socrates, we are initially attracted to the notion of moving up the ladder from the pursuit of romantic love to the procreation of children, to the life of political achievement and then to the pursuit of wisdom. It seems, at first, that as we rise, the power and importance of intimate ties to particular other people are diminished. And that makes us less vulnerable to the contingencies of fate and fortune that make it so hard for us to find our other half. Yet for human beings, if not for Socrates, the importance of our relationships to other human beings is never entirely overcome.

Actually that is wrong, for it suggests that we should want to overcome our relationship to other human beings. That is what the text suggests on the surface. And, in doing so, it does capture a characteristic way in which eros is expressed, especially by those whose erotic desires are strong and thus who seek a connection to an ideal outside themselves. But on deeper examination, the text shows us that the aspiration to reach beyond ourselves, and beyond our attachment to particular other people, ultimately leads us right back to them. For the goods of political and philosophic life are supported by intimate relationships with other people. And the more we learn about our circumstances, the more we recognize that those relationships are inescapable for other reasons as well, for the protection we receive from our lovers in a life that is difficult and uncertain, for the sexual pleasure that helps us deal with the anxiety of a life lived in pursuit of a good that lies beyond our lives, for the pleasure that binds us to our lovers, and for the flesh and blood children whose love for us is not replaceable by either political success or philosophic wisdom.

The Symposium leads us, then, not to pursue the austere life of a philosopher but to recognize the good of an erotic life of many kinds. And in each way we seek to possess the good forever, we need the company of someone we love. We human beings are weak in both body and soul. We need the support of others to sustain ourselves physically. We need other with whom to raise our children. We need political allies who care about us and or ideals. And we need to know and be known by a particular other person in order to come to know ourselves.

And so we can't wholly escape the love of another person. That makes us vulnerable in many ways. There is the old Aristophanic problem, of finding our other half, which is not entirely relieved if we can create our other half by living and working and loving another person. For that person is, after all, only flesh and blood and we can lose him or her at any time. And there is another problem, one that only becomes apparent as we conclude the text.

The Symposium, points us to a vision not of philosophical purity but, rather, of a perfect love that combines all the varieties of erotic expression in a single relationship. Yet it also shows us why that vision is almost certainly unattainable. For it just takes a moment for us to recognize that that to combine a family with politics and politics with philosophy and all of them with the pursuit of sexual pleasure is to seek more than is likely to be possible in our short lives. And, in addition to the lack of time is the difficulty of finding one person with whom we can share each of those erotic pursuits.

Like Alcibiades, then, we are bound to disappointment. We can react with the drunken frustration that Alcibiades displays in his speech and, if Nussbaum and others are right, with the drunken destruction that takes place later than night. Or we can pay attention to the last words of Socrates, who is trying to convince a drunken Agathon (the tragedian) and a drunken Aristophanes (the comedian) that it is possible to write a dramatic work that combines tragedy and comedy. Of course, that is the work we are reading. And we learn from it that seen from the inside, our erotic desires are tragic because they cannot be fulfilled. And, if we are unfortunately caught between one kind of erotic life or another—or one person and another—then the tragedy is very real. But, if we can look at ourselves as the comedian Aristophanes does, from the outside, then we can take refuge in the comic picture of these small, hairless bipeds, with big heads and extraordinary dreams of a perfect love. If we can move between tragic and comic views of ourselves perhaps we can find a balance between one and another kind of erotic satisfaction, a balance that suits both the general erotic desire to possess the good forever and the particular path we and our lovers take through life.