

ABSTRACT

The Therapeutic *Symposium*: Poverty, Resource, and Shame in the Philosophic Condition

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Plato's *Symposium* is one of his most celebrated dialogues--a dialogue so eventful, with such memorable characters, that it has received significant scholarly attention. Perhaps precisely on account of the *Symposium*'s many memorable characters, however, Apollodorus and Aristodemus, two characters who contribute the *Symposium*'s narrative frame, have mostly been forgotten. I call for new attention to these two characters, arguing that together with the more famous Alcibiades, they jointly dramatize a shared problem to which Socrates is actually attempting to offer a kind of solution--a therapy--when he gives his speech in praise of Love. Specifically, these three characters experience misplaced shame that is obstructing their sincere and fruitful participation in the philosophic life. Socrates teaches that *Eros* himself is in-between poverty (*penia*) and resource (*poros*), and that this is true of the philosopher, as well. Thus, a philosopher must learn to coexist with both poverty and resource. It is their failure to cope with both that has inspired obstructive shame in these characters. Unfortunately, a sad twist to Socrates' attempted therapy is that although Apollodorus and Aristodemus are apparently

able to *repeat* Socrates' lesson (as part of their narration), they do not seem to have *learned* the lesson.

My dissertation examines the role of shame in Plato and discusses attempts by Socrates--as dramatized in the *Symposium* and in other dialogues, also--to contribute to his friends' and interlocutors' preparation for the philosophical life. Socrates would like to acquaint his friends with philosophical methods, dismantle obstacles (such as obstructive shame) to their participation in the philosophical life, bolster their spirits, and call upon them to come to the defense of their own souls. However, as the dramatic situation of the *Symposium* demonstrates, we can allow that Socrates is trying to help his friends without the implication that he is succeeding. I suggest that Plato has actually posed this problem for Socrates, so that Plato himself can treat the therapeutic Socrates as a point of departure, pointing ahead to his own use of the dialogue form and suggesting how he can exceed Socrates at creating preparedness for philosophy.

The Therapeutic Symposium: Poverty, Resource, and Shame in the Philosophic Condition

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Obstructive Shame in the Narrative Frame of Plato's *Symposium*

Outline of the Dissertation

My dissertation examines the claim that Plato's *Symposium*¹ dramatizes an attempt by Socrates to offer his friends and interlocutors a therapy. Characters of the *Symposium* are suffering from a shared condition of misplaced shame, which obstructs or detracts from their participation in the philosophical life. So the Socrates of the *Symposium* gives a lesson about *Eros* that is not merely conceptual; it is intended as a model for coping with the philosophic condition.

In the present chapter, I develop my reading of Plato's *Symposium*, with the particular goal of showing that shame is a notable, if subtle, theme of the dialogue, and that Alcibiades, as well as Apollodorus and Aristodemus (two characters who provide the *Symposium*'s narrative frame), jointly demonstrate three ways obstructive shame could be a significant obstacle to philosophy. In their own individual ways, none of them has been able to come to terms with the suspension between poverty and resource that the Socrates of the *Symposium* will suggest is at the heart of the philosophic condition. The dialogue's dramatic situation is positioning their misplaced shame as a problem to which Socrates attempts to pose a solution, or therapy. Unfortunately, the persistent obstructive shame of Apollodorus, Aristodemus, and Alcibiades evidences their misapprehension not only of Socrates' lesson, but of something about the very character of the philosophical life.

¹ Throughout the dissertation, I will appeal to: Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989).

In Chapter Two, I respond to published literature on the role of shame in Plato, most notably the view that Plato and Socrates advocate shaming of a specific, civically salutary kind. I turn my attention to Plato's *Gorgias* for the duration of the chapter, since the *Gorgias* is the single Platonic dialogue that has most been acknowledged as a good source of insight into Plato's view of shame and shaming. I highlight merits and contributions of existing writing on the subject of shame in Plato, but I also point to ways in which that writing has not, I believe, accounted for the full complexity of the *Gorgias* text itself. Ultimately, I will propose an alternate approach to shame in Plato, giving reasons why I believe it would be preferable to redirect conversation about shame in Plato away from the question whether Plato and/or Socrates *advocate* shaming.

Instead, in Chapter Three, I propose that the highly relevant textual evidence found in the *Gorgias* would be better considered alongside relevantly similar textual evidence from the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, because these three Platonic dialogues together participate in a pattern: each of them investigates shame, *eros*, and rhetoric within a single dramatic situation. Each of these three dialogues dilates the importance of one or more of the three themes while investigating the others more subtly. But all three dialogues show that shame, *eros*, and rhetoric intertwine. I argue that Plato's own interest in treating these three topics jointly is itself a good reason for his readers to think that we will better understand the role of shame in Plato when we investigate it alongside *eros* and rhetoric. The third chapter concludes with an argument that the best prescriptive approaches to Socratic and Platonic pedagogy will be those that consider how one can lead souls (rhetorically) *both* through exciting love for the good and through exposing the kinds of difficult truths that may occasion shame.

Chapter Four goes into greater detail about the *Symposium*'s therapeutic aspects, and examines the idea of preparation to practice philosophy. Plato has implicitly foregrounded this notion of preparedness in the *Symposium*'s first line: "In fact, your question does not find me unprepared" (*Symposium* 172a). Apollodorus, the narrator who speaks this line, is prepared for some things, surely, but his preparedness specifically to participate in the philosophical life is called into serious question by his characterization within the dialogue. Ironically, I argue, Apollodorus' very fixation on demonstrating his own preparedness is an important sign of his obstructive shame. If it is the essential nature of the philosophic condition to require coexistence with *both* poverty and resource, as the Socrates of the *Symposium* thinks it is, then to be overcome with misplaced shame at the thought of one's own poverty (and therefore preoccupied with establishing one's resource) can present a significant obstacle to sincere creative and collaborative philosophical engagement.

Although obstruction by misplaced shame is far from the only way a person might be under-prepared to cope with the philosophic condition, the obstructive shame of Apollodorus, Aristodemus, and Alcibiades is an example of a problem that Socrates might wish to alleviate if he can. The remainder of Chapter Four examines how Socrates' speech in praise of Love can be read as a therapy, intended to guide Socrates' hearers toward a more salutary relationship with philosophy. Socrates tries to add to his friends' preparation for philosophy, especially by (a) telling an origin story about himself, in which he represents himself to his audience as someone who learned, and (b) offering the *Eros* origin myth as an imitable paradigm of the philosophical life. Socrates wants his

friends to overcome misplaced, obstructive shame through understanding that they can learn to coexist with both poverty and resource, just as he once did.

In Chapter Five, I examine four additional dialogues from which Plato may have expected readers to take away lessons about poverty, resource, and philosophic preparedness. In each of these particular dialogues, Socrates either intercedes on behalf of a young person and attempts to protect that young person by adding to his preparation for philosophy, or he tells an origin story about himself, suggesting something about how he personally grew as a philosopher--or both. I employ the *Symposium*'s poverty and resource dyad as a tool for eliciting insights from these dialogues about preparation for philosophy.

Then, in my concluding chapter, I ask how Plato inherits Socrates' therapeutic legacy. The *Symposium* encourages Plato's audience to think about Socrates' legacy, through its emphasis on the importance of reproduction and giving birth in beauty. Socrates himself, as he tells it, received his positive knowledge about *eros* from a teacher named Diotima, and now he is trying to pass that knowledge on. But if the Socrates of the *Symposium* teaches a lesson that is intended to enhance his friends' preparation for philosophy and to free them from obstructive shame, his friends seem, unfortunately, to have responded instead by fixating on Socrates himself. Rather than coming to terms with their own poverty and resource, Apollodorus, Aristodemus, and Alcibiades each have tried to secure a sense of their own value through fastening on some kind of special-status relationship with Socrates. Moreover, although Apollodorus and Aristodemus seem manifestly able to *repeat* Socrates' lesson (judging by their respective acts of narration),

textual evidence suggests that they are nonetheless not cured of their shame, and thus have probably not understood and *learned* the lesson.

According to my therapeutic reading of Plato's *Symposium*, Socrates is not insensible to the misplaced shame of his interlocutors and has tried to help them. But he hasn't succeeded. In my conclusion, I ask how Socrates' failure may point ahead to Plato himself and to the special resources of the dialogue form. In what respects did Plato believe he could exceed Socrates, especially rhetorically and pedagogically? How does the dialogue form function as a coping mechanism for dealing with poverty and resource? How can the dialogue form contribute to Plato's readers' preparation for philosophy? And how does the therapeutic *Symposium* point to Plato, as the true heir of Socrates' lesson?

The Narrative Frame of the Symposium: Setting the Stage

The work of answering these questions begins with focused attention to the narrative frame of the *Symposium*, and to the nested narrators who compose it. A Platonic dialogue can be said to have a "narrative frame" if Plato has chosen to represent the events of the main dramatic action (during which Socrates will generally be portrayed asking and answering questions in at least one dialectical exchange, along with other assorted events) in the form of a story being told, probably aloud, by a narrator under circumstances sometimes more specific and sometimes less.² In the *Symposium*, the

² I have been carefully taught to attend to narrative frame concerns and to the earliest events and lines of Plato's dialogues by the work of Anne-Marie Schultz. Some of her thought on narrative frame in Plato can be examined in: Anne-Marie Schultz, *Plato's Socrates as Narrator: A Philosophical Muse* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), and in Anne-Marie Bowery, "Know Thyself: Socrates as Storyteller," in *Philosophy in Dialogue: Plato's Many Devices*, ed. Gary Alan Scott (Evanston:

dramatic action begins with Socrates and Aristodemus meeting and agreeing to go together to Agathon's victory party. The narrative frame consists of Apollodorus (a character who did not attend the symposium) reciting to an unnamed "friend" the version of the story that he got from Aristodemus.

Not all Platonic dialogues have a narrator, and when they do, the narrator may or may not be describing events in which he personally took part. The character Phaedo narrates the dialogue that shares his name, for example, and that dialogue's narrative frame depicts Phaedo remembering aloud his own experiences of the day that Socrates was put to death. We can tell from the details Plato chooses to reveal within the narrative frame of the *Phaedo* that Phaedo's listener is a named character, Echecrates, who specifically asks to hear Phaedo's story. But although Phaedo will describe the setting, circumstances, and the cast-members present in his memories of Socrates, we're told much less about where Phaedo and Echecrates are, if anyone is with them, and what they are doing right now.

Phaedo's first-hand experience of the events sometimes colors his account with emotion and adds a dimension of deeply personal significance, but at other times his narrative voice retreats, and the reporting of events takes on such an even-handed and factual flavor that we might almost forget Phaedo's influence altogether.³ Certainly it is

Northwestern University Press, 2007), 82-110. Other writers exploring the role of narrative frame in Plato include: Ruby Blondell, *The Play of Character in Plato's Dialogues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), Nails, Debra. *Agora, Academy, and the Conduct of Philosophy*. Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1995, and D. Tarrant, "Orality and Plato's Narrative Dialogues," in *Voice into Text*, ed. Ian Worthington (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 129-147.

³ Throughout the dissertation, I will appeal to: Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, in *Plato. Complete Works*, ed. J. Cooper, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 49-100.

not the case that Phaedo himself takes center stage throughout the dramatic action, just because it consists of his memories.

In a contrasting example, Socrates himself provides the narrative frame for the *Lysis*. As with Phaedo, Socrates seems to be describing his own memories, but unlike in the *Phaedo*, Plato does not specify an identity for Socrates' listener(s), or clearly explain when, where, or why Socrates would be narrating the events of the *Lysis* aloud. Leaving Socrates' auditor unspecified may invite Plato's reader to think of him or herself as

There is an interesting moment at *Phaedo* 88c, almost at the exact midpoint of the dialogue, where the emotions of Phaedo and Echecrates suddenly come to prominence. The debate between Socrates, Simmias, and Cebes over arguments for the immortality of the soul has been treated mostly academically to this moment. Now, after a long and persistent exchange, Cebes has made an argument which would seem to undermine confidence in the soul's survival after death: perhaps souls outlast bodies, but what reason do we have to think that it follows souls last forever? The ensuing moment of implied *aporia* seems to wash over the audience, and then over Phaedo and Echecrates themselves, in the 'present.' First Socrates' friends (in the story) "were all depressed, as we told each other afterwards"--though they try to manage their attitude for the sake of Socrates and of the argument (*Phaedo* 88c)--and then Echecrates cries out, interrupting the story, "By the gods, Phaedo, you have my sympathy, for as I listen to you now, I find myself saying to myself, 'What argument shall we trust, now that that of Socrates, which was extremely convincing, has fallen into discredit?'" (*Phaedo* 88d). This moment certainly serves to remind Plato's audience of the emotional investment felt by Phaedo as narrator, by Echecrates as listener, and by all of Socrates' assembled friends in the *Phaedo*'s life-and-death dramatic situation. And it does so just in time for Phaedo's story to capture a temporary Socratic digression in the dramatic action: away from dialectic and toward, instead, an intimate moment of affection between Socrates and Phaedo himself, during which Socrates urges Phaedo--and all his friends--that, above all, they should not allow themselves to become "haters of reasonable discourse" (or "misologues") on account of the sincere emotional distress that can sometimes result from trusting an argument, only to watch it fall through (*Phaedo* 89c-91d). The Socrates of the *Phaedo* seems to take seriously that the emotional dimensions of the philosophical life can become obstructive, and his willingness temporarily to table the immortality-of-the-soul discussion in favor of the warning against misology strongly suggests that Socrates' highest priority is not to deliver a final, conclusive argument that will win his friends over to agreement with him, but to protect his friends against ever abandoning their pursuit of the truth.

Socrates' immediate audience for the story. Leaving Socrates' motives for narrating unspecified may invite the reader to speculate about what they might be.

Socrates' first-person narration of the *Lysis* means that, for example, he is able directly to disclose to Plato's readers thoughts about where he was going and what he was doing at the moment when he encountered the other *Lysis* characters and turned aside to engage them in dialogue. But it is worth noting that Plato generally does not use first-person narration and/or the inclusion of a narrative frame to lay bare to his audience just anything about his narrators that that audience might be interested in knowing. Plato's first-person narrators both disclose themselves and keep their cards rather close to the vest. That Plato sometimes provides a narrating personality while concealing at least as much about that personality as he reveals contributes to the ambiguity of the dialogue form.

The narrative frame of the *Symposium*, specifically, is an interesting case, because it is what I describe (perhaps clumsily) as a "nested narration," involving two narrator-characters, one of whom (Apollodorus) has received his account of the symposium from the other (Aristodemus, actually a participant). Any time Plato makes the decision to represent the dramatic action of one of his dialogues as a story being retold rather than as a set of "immediate" events, it stands to reason that Plato might hope his audience notices something special about the character of the narrator or perhaps takes time to contemplate the ways that information and insight are passed from one person to another. That Apollodorus, the "outermost" narrator of the *Symposium*, is retelling events he has only at second-hand places the events of this particular dramatic action at an even more noticeable remove from "immediacy" than usual. And although it remains somewhat

mysterious, this literary choice by Plato does seem fitting for a dialogue whose conceptual crux at Socrates' speech will emphasize reproduction, "because reproduction goes on forever; it is what mortals have in place of immortality" (*Symposium* 206e).

As the *Symposium* opens, the "outermost" narrator, Apollodorus, seems very eager to repeat the events of a symposium Socrates once attended. We see that he has a conversation partner who has asked to hear the story, but this conversation partner is referred to only as a "friend." Anything we learn about Apollodorus' attitudes and values comes to us through what he says aloud to the "friend" and from the way the "friend" reacts to him in turn, since Apollodorus' inner monologue is not described. Little to no emphasis is placed on where or when this encounter between Apollodorus and "friend" is taking place.⁴

Apollodorus implies that he knows many such anecdotes about Socrates, including some that take place in a time well before he and Socrates met and became associates. In fact, Apollodorus seems to collect these stories (*Symposium* 172b-173c), acting as a kind of self-appointed amanuensis to Socrates. He recounts to the "friend" how he once educated a past conversation-partner on this very point: "Glaucón," Apollodorus had said, "how could you? You know very well Agathon hasn't lived in Athens for many years while it's been less than three that I've been Socrates' companion and *made it my job to know exactly what he says and does each day*" (*Symposium* 172c-173a, emphasis mine).

⁴ Interestingly, Apollodorus wants the "friend" to know about a previous time he told this same story, and the conversation partner in his anecdote *is* named (Glaucón), and Apollodorus *does* mention some details about the setting and circumstances from the previous time he told this story.

Agathon's symposium, a drinking party given in honor of his prize-winning tragedy and attended by Socrates and friends, must be a notable piece in the collection of such a Socrates-completist, to judge by the way Apollodorus seems to get special requests for this particular story; the "friend" and the past conversation partner, Glaucon, have both come to Apollodorus to hear the story, and when Glaucon first asked Apollodorus, he had apparently already tried to get a version of the story from a man named Phoenix, whose original source (Aristodemus) was the same as Apollodorus', but who reportedly told the story very badly (*Symposium* 172a-b, 173e). It seems to be reasonably well-known that at this particular symposium, Socrates and all the assembled guests forewent drinking and each delivered speeches in praise of the god of Love. Thus, for Apollodorus to say he's prepared to tell this story means he will need to be prepared to recapitulate each of the speeches to the best of his ability.

It is interesting to note that although Apollodorus says he already follows Socrates around and takes note of all his daily activities, when past-conversation-partner Glaucon asked whether Apollodorus had his version of this story from Socrates himself (who, after all, was an attendee and a notable one), Apollodorus, by his own report, did not just answer "no," he said "Oh, for god's sake, of course not!" (*Symposium* 173b). One wonders why Apollodorus himself would be prone to treat this suggestion as absurd, especially since Apollodorus apparently *did* "check part of [Aristodemus'] story with Socrates, and Socrates agreed with his account" (*Symposium* 173b). Perhaps Socrates' own investment in the recounting of these events is significantly less than that of either Aristodemus (who has told his story to at least two other people) or Apollodorus (who has now told Aristodemus' story to at least two other people). Socrates will approve the

accuracy of whichever parts of the story Apollodorus was able to check with him, but for some reason has not gone to the trouble of rehashing the entire symposium story for Apollodorus, all from his own point of view. Given Apollodorus' extreme dedication to knowledge of Socratic minutia, it is difficult not to feel that if Apollodorus could only get Socrates to do such a thing for him, he would be very much in favor of it. So perhaps this is one story Socrates himself is just not equally interesting interested in retelling.

The Mystery of the Nested Narrators

It is a fair question for Plato why Apollodorus, Aristodemus, and the *Symposium's* narrative frame even exist. After all, the *Symposium* is a Platonic dialogue that already offers more than the usual array of memorable characters and events. The rules of procedure to which the symposiasts jointly agree, for example, promote a dialogue structure that yields detailed, textural, substantive speeches from multiple participants, not to mention examples of interlocutor-to-interlocutor critique that Socrates doesn't have to impose or motivate.⁵ One or more of these speeches are highly entertaining. The subject matter--*Eros*, his virtues, and his works on behalf of humankind--seems to speak to deep and very human priorities in each of the participants. What the symposiasts

⁵ Led by Eryximachus, the symposiasts agree that every partygoer will "give as good a speech in praise of Love as he is capable of giving, in proper order from left to right" (*Symposium* 177d). When each new speaker takes his turn, he usually begins by critiquing something about both the general method and the content of the previous speaker, saying what parts he agreed with and what parts he didn't. This pattern shows either that these particular characters are so used to Socrates and his interrogation of definitions and distinctions, that they take the critical yoke upon themselves in order to spare Socrates the trouble of interrupting and correcting them, or, more simply, that Socrates is far from being the only Athenian gentleman who notices and would point out these kinds of errors and tensions. Not until it's almost Socrates' own turn to speak does Socrates make a move to disrupt the speaking order with a critique. If the symposiasts are only humoring Socrates, they may be underestimating his tolerance for waiting his turn.

believe about Love has everything to do with what they believe makes good people good and life joyous or bearable or generally worth living. And whether you believe that Socrates and his inherited lesson on the *erotic* ascent make for the high point of the dialogue or that they are subtly (or unsubtly) trumped by another character's contribution, the *Symposium* certainly offers a rare, memorable, and vividly-realized example of Socrates adopting a positive and inspirational position.

And that is not to mention that the dialogue has an actual surprise ending. Following Socrates' speech, any subsequent dialectical exchange is upstaged by the sudden arrival of a drunken interloper. Alcibiades, Socrates' once-dear younger friend, has often been thought to problematize the optimism of Socrates' inspirational speech about Love when he makes a speech of his own, about Socrates, during which he unloads the pain of their relationship history and expresses frustration, rejection, and deep dissatisfaction with himself. Alcibiades laments,

...the moment [Socrates] starts to speak, I am beside myself: my heart starts leaping in my chest, the tears come streaming down my face, even the frenzied Corybantes seem sane compared to me--and let me tell you, I am not alone. I have heard Pericles and many other great orators, and I have admired their speeches. But nothing like this ever happened to me: they never upset me so deeply that my very own soul started protesting that my life--*my* life!--was no better than the most miserable slave's. And yet that is exactly how this Marsyas here at my side makes me feel all the time: he makes it seem that my life isn't worth living! (*Symposium* 215e-216a).

So, this dialogue is already interesting and substantive enough. Why should Plato bother to add Apollodorus, a narrator, telling the events of the dialogue to an unnamed "friend," and Aristodemus, a companion of Socrates, whose first-hand attendance at the titular symposium Apollodorus is now recounting at secondhand?

It is additionally a fair question for Plato why Apollodorus and Aristodemus are such *strange* characters. Though the role of each man in the dialogue is brief and ostensibly minor--which is already a little curious, given that Aristodemus, the first-hand witness, was present *throughout* the symposium and should thus in theory have been a more significant participant--and though neither of the two men is obviously essential to the literary or philosophical merit of the work, in each case, their characterization attains the level of caricature. Apollodorus is flagrantly emotional, judgmental, and a crank. He will refer to himself as both a “failure” and a “maniac.” Aristodemus, meanwhile, is portrayed as self-abasing and dependent. Making asides at the expense of his own primary source, Apollodorus actually seems to hold Aristodemus in contempt. If Apollodorus and Aristodemus are truly non-essential dialogue personnel, then Plato has gone to some unnecessary trouble sketching their peculiarities.⁶ In short, we would like an explanation for these characters.

In her article, “Socrates’ Contest with the Poets in Plato’s *Symposium*,” Mary Nichols addresses interpretations of the *Symposium* that have attempted to “rescue” Plato from the severe critique of Socrates which can seem called-for by his young friend Alcibiades’ drunken meltdown and long-term failure to realize a philosophical life of stable, virtuous moral character. Plato will not be held culpable for his character Socrates’

⁶ Compare Phaedo, the narrator of the *Phaedo*. Phaedo seems sensitive, cooperative, reflective, and affectionate. He is good at putting his emotions into words. But by comparison with the outsize personality of Apollodorus, he’s either noticeably more moderate--or just more *normal*. Phaedo shows balance that Apollodorus and Aristodemus seem to lack. (And interestingly, in the course of his narration, Phaedo will have occasion to remark specifically on some immoderate displays of emotion by Apollodorus himself, since Plato places Apollodorus there with Phaedo at Socrates’ execution).

failures, such an argument usually goes, if Plato actually intends the dialogue to point readers to the discreet philosophical superiority of one of the other symposiasts.⁷

Aristophanes, comic poet and real-life lampooner of Socrates, is usually considered the best candidate to upstage Socrates, because Aristophanes' speech, in which he imagines that lovers are really the two incomplete, left-over halves of the peculiar and wonderful double-creatures human beings once used to be, and therefore long more than anything to rejoin one another, is poignant, imaginative, and not hyper-rational.

Nichols disagrees, however, that either Aristophanes or Agathon (the second-best candidate) exceeds Socrates in Plato's own judgment. She argues that their speeches make two complementary versions of what is ultimately the same error: neither of their speeches is able to present a worldview that *both* maintains the distinction between the lowly and the divine *and* explains how humans (who are not divine) can still have hope of aspiring to divine things.

In the speech of Aristophanes the comic poet, the gods punish human *hybris* by cutting humans in half, splitting the once-doubled creatures into separate and yearning parts. Aristophanes claims that when lovers find and cling to one another, it's because they really used to be part of one body, and they are attempting to approximate that former whole. Nichols notes that Aristophanes does not describe these lovers as wanting to talk to one another or even to look at one another; rather, their whole impetus is mute, inarticulate physical union. Nor does Aristophanes' speech give his sundered lovers

⁷ Nichols herself focuses on Nussbaum and Vlastos. Mary P. Nichols, "Socrates' Contest with the Poets in Plato's 'Symposium'." *Political Theory: An International Journal of Political Philosophy* 32, no. 2 (April 2004): 186-7, accessed March 2, 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0090591703256093>.

virtue, education, arts, crafts, or sciences.⁸ In fact, the gods, in an effort to remind humanity of their mortal limitations, have rearranged the bodies of the now-sundered humans so that they are, literally, navel-gazers. The humans must be able to look down at the marks on their bellies, the visible record of their punishment, in order to see and recall what was done to them. But there is no similar encouragement to look up to the heavens.⁹

The tragic poet Agathon, by contrast, fails to honor the distinction between the lowly and the divine. He grants to the god of Love divine attributes including beauty, virtue, and eternal youth, but he also emphasizes that love is between beings that are alike and casts himself as Love's own beloved, strongly implying that Agathon himself possesses those very same relevant divine attributes. Thus, Agathon's speech shows how the human and the divine can love each other, but only when they have falsely been made "like" one another; the distinction between the two has effectively (and impiously) been collapsed.¹⁰

Nichols observes that what both these speeches lack is something Socrates' symposium speech, which he will credit to his teacher, Diotima, offers: a story in which the human and the divine retain their distinct identities, but in which philosophy, which aspires to the beautiful, the good, and the true (all of which are divine) is still possible. In Socrates' speech, philosophy is made possible by the "in-between."

Socrates's speech will deny that Love is a wholly divine character, defining him, instead, as a mediating spirit between the lowly and the high (*Symposium* 202e-203a).

⁸ Ibid., 188-89.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 192.

Because *Eros* is himself a *lover*, Socrates (and Diotima) reason that, by definition, *Eros* either lacks what he loves or lacks assurance of keeping it forever (*Symposium* 204c-206b).¹¹ However, Love is not totally without positive attributes, either. Love is descended from both *Poros* (“resource”) and *Penia* (“poverty”), and he shares in both his parents’ natures,¹² so Love may not be beautiful or wise, and he may be “always living with Need,” but he can also be “a schemer after the beautiful and the good... brave, impetuous, and intense” (*Symposium* 203c-e). Socrates’ *encomium* to Love aims at explaining how mortality and immortality, the mundane and the divine, poverty and resource, can be interconnected and can incrementally concur in human life.

In sum, Nichols adjudicates this dispute about Plato’s view of Socrates by highlighting the poverty and resource dyad articulated in Socrates’ speech and *extending its authority*, showing how the “in-between” actually governs and guides the composition of portions of the dialogue that lie well outside the immediate context in which the “in-between” was introduced and discussed.

¹¹ Socrates equates love with desire. If one possesses the fullness of everything one could possibly desire and has no risk of losing it, Socrates and Diotima agree that one is no longer desirous; now one is *happy* (*Symposium* 202c-206b). This choice to equate love with desire may be considered a non-obvious and problematic one, but as I will suggest in Chapter Four, the Socrates of the *Symposium* seems much more interested in *Eros* as a paradigm of the philosopher than he does in conceptual exploration of love from every angle. If Love is a philosopher, then it makes sense to describe love as desiring, because a philosopher is a seeker of wisdom, not totally ignorant, but not wise either.

¹² In fact, as Nichols herself observes, Love’s parents already exhibit the “in-between” in their own natures, as well. *Poros* is resourceful, but he requires *Penia* to beget a child. *Penia* is poverty-stricken but a schemer, not wholly unlike *Poros* himself. See Mary P. Nichols, “Socrates’ Contest with the Poets in Plato’s ‘Symposium’.” *Political Theory: An International Journal of Political Philosophy* 32, no. 2 (April 2004), accessed March 2, 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0090591703256093>.

What I am looking to do in this chapter is to extend the authority of the “in-between” still further, by demonstrating that this same poverty and resource dyad also governs--and explains--Plato’s composition of the dialogue’s narrative frame. Although Apollodorus and Aristodemus hardly look alike (and hardly both seem necessary on the face of it), Plato’s characterization of Apollodorus and Aristodemus makes sense when we consider these two in light of something they share: failure to come to terms with *both* poverty and resource.

The *Symposium*’s narrative frame shows that Socrates is, in fact, presented with a problem that afflicts his young interlocutors, and that his singular confidence when he says “the only thing I say I understand is the art of love” reflects not primarily his unique conceptual mastery of *eros* as an idea (though he might be justified in claiming that, too), but rather his proposed therapy for this type of philosophically-obstructive affliction (*Symposium* 177d-e). Socrates is quietly promising to show these friends, and by extension Plato’s audience, a way of being a philosopher that comes to terms with the philosophical suspension between poverty and resource, ignorance and wisdom, and can help them to escape the painful condition of obstructive shame in which he finds them.

Remarks on My Method and Interpretive Assumptions

Before going much further, I think it will be helpful briefly to mention a few assumptions under which I operate when I read Plato:

First of all, my sense of conviction that the fine-grained literary qualities and the dramatic action of Platonic dialogues bear very importantly on the dialogues’ meaning and function (and therefore on any really thorough effort to understand Plato as a philosopher), now far exceeds my sense of conviction about any one reading of my own.

If I were to abandon my current interpretation of, for example, the *Symposium*, it would be because it was shown to account poorly for the totality of the textual evidence and not, I feel certain, because I were capable of giving up on the idea that the textual evidence in question is complex, internally ordered, and highly deliberate. At a certain point, the pattern of peculiar or outstanding dialogue details which may seem arbitrary at first blush, but which, when pursued (even from a place of bafflement, annoyance, or mere ticklish amusement) turn out to connect with and illuminate key philosophical themes, becomes so forceful, so incorrigible, that I believe Plato's wit, self-complication, and ordered philosophical mischief simply become impossible to unsee. By which I mean: it surely remains very easy to misunderstand Plato, but it becomes very difficult to doubt how much Plato there is to be understood. If anyone who happens to be reading my dissertation should doubt this much, I would be pleased if my work can function, if nothing else, as an example collection of the kinds of literary details in Plato that demand interpretation and of the potentially fascinating philosophical stories we can tell through the effort to come to terms with these details--not, that is, on account of any peculiar excellence in the work, but simply through concerted attention to the richness of the text.

Second, I treat the Socrates of every dialogue as a literary character, whose specific characterization is always dictated by Plato's own literary purpose. Plato's literary purpose may always or at particular times have included recording some acts and ideas of the historical Socrates, but in the absence of strong evidence distinguishing the largely-unknown historical Socrates from the literary versions of Socrates that we encounter in Plato's dialogues (and in other fictionalized sources, such as Xenophon), I prefer not to presume the ability to recognize faultlines between Plato's specific

influences. It is reasonable to think that if Plato sometimes wished to preserve intact something about the historical Socrates, but at other times preferred to repurpose Socrates, whether by making him into a Platonic mouthpiece or just by sending him into an invented philosophic scenario, Plato did so with an eye to the coherence and function of his own creation, and honored the historical Socrates by enfolded him into new narratives with their own carefully-edited, highly deliberate literary and philosophical character. And if the historical Socrates really believed, as the character Socrates says in the *Phaedo*, that philosophers should “give but little thought to Socrates but much more to the truth,” then it is hard to imagine he minded an imaginative and even unvarnished version of his person if it served the strategic purpose of bringing Plato’s audience into discourse with philosophy (*Phaedo* 91b-c).¹³

Third, I have a strong preference for crediting all the actions taken by Socrates within a dialogue to that particular literary version of Socrates, and place a high burden of proof on interpretations according to which Plato imposes himself on the dialogue at some specific point, in effect, sneaking in to take Socrates’ place. This is not, however,

¹³ Later in the dissertation, I argue that for Plato, preparation for philosophy includes preparation to come to the defense of your own soul. When one receives teaching, it may help the soul *or* harm it. The dialogue form, with its fundamental ambiguity, could be designed to help readers avoid uncritically submitting themselves to the authority of a teacher, even the authority of such a man as Socrates. The play of irony and the concealment of characters’ motivations, for example, through focus on ambiguous speech acts, place demands on the reader or auditor to ask which characters and which views should be trusted--and how we can know. If I am right about this, it might be a very honest move on Plato’s part imaginatively to replicate uncertainty surrounding Socrates, because as Socrates’ own young student, Plato would have had to come to the defense of his own soul, examining Socrates as to whether his tutelage would improve Plato’s soul or jeopardize it. And even if Plato arrived at the conclusion that Socrates’ character and intentions were completely sound, he would likely prefer to train his audience members to make such an assessment for themselves, rather than merely to supply them with a Platonic testimonial. The imagination and ambiguity surrounding the Socrates of Plato’s dialogues can excite this kind of questioning.

because I worry about detracting from the legacy of the historical Socrates. (And there is no need to worry about detracting from the legacy of a fictionalized Socrates). Rather, I believe that the most complex and sympathetic treatment of Socrates' methods yields the most complex understanding of Plato's own.

Plato's fictional Socrates has many admirable qualities but also has limitations and makes missteps. Plato's dialogues portray the character Socrates making a grand assay at arousing sincere philosophical kinship in his fellow Athenians, kinship that he never actually achieves with them. I take it that Socrates' failure is far more interesting and that his philosophical successor Plato inherits a far more knotty rhetorical and pedagogical problem, if we grant to the character Socrates every technique and every nuance his portrayal in the dialogues will allow. The failure of a simplistic and hyper-rational Socrates is easy to explain. The failure of a multifaceted, artful, emotionally astute, and even adaptable Socrates demands greater attention and concern from Plato's audience.

Crediting the Socrates of each dialogue with maximal complexity steals nothing away from Plato, either. So long as the textual evidence, by virtue of its detail and internal coherence, supports the analysis that Plato is awake to his characterization of Socrates and to the character's merits and detriments, Plato inherits every Socratic technique that the dramatic action of the dialogue implicitly affirms, while preserving his own freedom to critique Socratic pedagogies and, by means of the dialogue form itself, to point ahead to what Plato himself can uniquely offer, beyond (or at least different from) what even the most charitable fictional Socrates is shown to be able to achieve.

Up to this point, I have focused on charity to the fictional Socrates as regards his strategies, aptitudes, and techniques. There is also the separate matter of charity to the fictional Socrates as regards to his intentions, judgment, sensitivity, and moral character. On this point my outlook is similar but not quite identical, because it's not necessarily the case that the most sophisticated and fruitful reading of Plato derives from the most *forgiving* reading of his character Socrates. The fictional Socrates exhibits either profound integrity or profound intractability--or both. Socrates frequently and famously makes claims that are either boldly ingenuous--almost alarming in their improbability but, if strictly true, professed from a dutiful conscience--or deluded, or distinctly arrogant. The most sophisticated Plato might be a Plato who intended for Socrates to be read as well-intentioned and ingenuous (though, I've already mentioned, not wildly successful in all his objectives), or as profoundly mistaken, or as a figure of *hybris* that Plato's audience should not wish to emulate.¹⁴ Whereas, with regard to Socratic and Platonic methods, the greatest interpretive demand is placed on Plato's audience when we regard Socrates most charitably, with regard to Socrates' moral character, the greatest interpretive demand is placed on Plato's audience when we approach Socrates' odd and outsize character with few to no preconceived notions, only the responsibility carefully to examine Socrates (certainly before taking him on as a philosophical hero and exemplar).

That said, as I will go on to discuss in Chapters Two and Six, I believe the fundamental ambiguity of the dialogue form empowers Plato's audience to examine the most idealistic and ingenuous Socrates alongside the most mistaken Socrates, alongside

¹⁴ Stanley Rosen's Socrates is a figure of towering *hybris*. Although Rosen does not seem to approach the study of the dialogues, themselves, cynically, his Socrates might be classed as a "cynic's Socrates." Stanley Rosen, *Plato's Symposium* (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 1999).

the most arrogant Socrates, alongside a Socrates who mingles any combination of the above characteristics, without necessarily denying the fruitfulness of any of these alternatives. To whatever extent a particular characterization of Socrates is coherently supportable on the basis of the textual evidence, I believe that version of Socrates empowers some kind of inquiry into the complexities of Plato's thought. If there is a *hybristic* version of Socrates that accords with Plato's textual evidence, then there is a version of Socrates that can teach Plato's readers something about the dangers of overweening pride. If there is a humble and ingenuous version of Socrates that can likewise accord with the same textual evidence--and I take it that Plato often deliberately suppresses and conceals information which his dialogues might easily have revealed, thereby leaving open more defensible interpretations¹⁵--then there is a version of Socrates that can teach Plato's readers about the loneliness of philosophy, the potential for misunderstanding, and the difficulty of translating good intentions into good pedagogy.

I believe that there should be a place in the discourse for attention to what I call "the idealist's Socrates"--that is, the version of Socrates most defined by ingenuous moral and philosophic integrity. Here again, the reason is essentially that this most charitable Socrates strives nobly, yet achieves few of his philosophical objectives, especially with regard to the service he says that he has been called to do for his community. The cynic's Socrates is also a fruitful figure in his own way, and likely necessary, but the idealist's Socrates--a maximally well-intentioned and self-aware Socrates--again makes for

¹⁵ I think immediately of all that Socrates, who is the dialogue's narrator, *could* tell the reader in the *Protagoras* and yet does not. For example, Socrates makes observations about Protagoras' mental state but doesn't explain, even briefly, how these observations are relevant to how he decides to act toward Protagoras. The amount of privileged first person information that Socrates reveals in the *Protagoras* also calls attention to how much he *doesn't* take the opportunity to reveal.

arguably the most interesting (qualified) *failure* of the Socratic cohort. I won't argue against the cynic's Socrates in this dissertation, but the reader will notice that I am chiefly concerned with an idealist's Socrates.

Finally, and as I have already implied, I take every reading of a Platonic dialogue to be a richer or poorer coherentist account of the available textual evidence, and my own reading(s) are no exception. This literary coherentism allows both for outright rejection of interpretations that show very poor attention to the text, and also for the potential side-by-side coexistence of non-contradictory interpretations which show equally excellent attention to the text but emphasize different features.

The Dramatic Action of the Symposium

At this point, it may be helpful to provide, as briefly as possible, a summary of the dramatic action and the major lessons of the *Symposium*. The titular symposium is a drinking party held in honor of a young, handsome, and recently-victorious local tragedian, Agathon. (By way of symmetry, you will recall that Aristophanes, a celebrated comic poet, also attends). On the day of the party, Socrates and his friend Aristodemus happen to run into one another and decide to go along together to Agathon's party, where, as far as they know, Aristodemus will be uninvited (*Symposium* 174a-175b). In the end, though, Aristodemus arrives first and alone at Agathon's gate, because Socrates keeps wandering off and leaving him. Agathon, host and guest of honor, will be quick to say that both Socrates and Aristodemus are valued guests, and to show Socrates as much by inviting him to share his own couch. "Socrates," Agathon calls right away, "Come lie down next to me. Who knows, if I touch you, I may catch a bit of the wisdom that came to you under my neighbor's porch," where Socrates was last seen standing alone and

pondering (*Symposium* 175d). Aristodemus, meanwhile, has been sent to share a couch with Eryximachus, a physician (*Symposium* 175a).

This seating accommodation divides Aristodemus and Socrates for most of the party, but then there are several couples in attendance, and they sit apart also. Agathon is the beautiful young beloved of older lover Pausanias. Eryximachus is the older lover of young Phaedrus. On Phaedrus' behalf, and for the sake of health, Eryximachus the physician requests a departure from the standard symposium activity, drinking to excess. Young Phaedrus considers the god of Love a neglected deity and would like to hear *Eros* praised. Thus, in place of drinking together, each of the symposiasts will deliver his own *encomium* to Love (*Symposium* 176c-177d). Eryximachus, who clearly enjoys a point of order or two, proposes rules. A speaking order is imposed and generally followed, though with at least one humorous exception, which I'll discuss later in the chapter.

Each symposiast's contribution includes suggestions not only about Love's properties but also about the best methods for correctly identifying and articulating those properties. Each symposiast imagines Love's purpose and his benefits to humans in his own self-referential way. When Socrates' turn comes last of all, he postpones giving his speech just long enough to engage his host (and the speaker who just concluded), Agathon, dialectically, according to his Socratic custom. Confronted with Socrates' questions about the soundness of his views--which had included the claims that Love possesses all beauty and youth and wisdom and virtue--Agathon agrees before very long that he must not have known what he was talking about. Because, Socrates' main objection goes, if *Eros* desires and pursues all those good things, it must be the case that

Eros himself lacks them, or at least lacks assurance of keeping them forever. One doesn't feel suffused with desire for the things one has already secured (*Symposium* 199c-201c).

Socrates then begins his own speech, but he makes the interesting decision to credit his material to someone else: a teacher, a priestess named Diotima, from whom Socrates learned. Socrates tells the other symposiasts a story about how he originally came by--and participated in, as interlocutor--the arguments that have since governed his knowledge on the subject of "the art of love," rather than simply treating these arguments as his own (*Symposium* 201d-212b). In Socrates' story, we see a student-Socrates who receives Diotima's instruction while making some of the very same mistakes the symposiast Agathon has made just that very evening. Diotima's lesson drives home the point that Love--and the mortal lover, not unlike him--desires to possess all good things but lacks them and is therefore not all-good or properly divine. Love is in-between the human and the divine. However, lovers may be comforted to learn that failure to possess the divine *good* does not make *Eros* either *bad* or without recourse. According to an origin myth Diotima tells, *Eros* is the son of two mythic figures: Penia ("poverty," always begging) and Poros ("resource," inventive and scheming), and both his parents contribute to his nature (*Symposium* 201e-204c). Impressively similar in character and appearance to Socrates himself, *Eros* is

always poor, and he's far from being delicate and beautiful (as ordinary people think he is); instead, he is tough and shriveled and shoeless and homeless, always lying in the dirt without a bed, sleeping at people's doorsteps and in roadsides under the sky, having his mother's nature, always living with Need. But on his father's side he is a schemer after the beautiful and the good; he is brave, impetuous, and intense, an awesome hunter, always weaving snares, resourceful in his pursuit of intelligence, a lover of wisdom through all his life, a genius with enchantments, potions, and clever pleadings. He is by nature neither immortal nor mortal. But now he springs to life when he gets his way; now he dies--all in the very

same day. Because he is his father's son, however, he keeps coming back to life, but then anything he finds his way to always slips away, and for this reason Love is never completely without resources, nor is he ever rich (*Symposium* 203c-e).

Beginning with this origin myth, Diotima crafts a personification of Love that emphasizes the love of *wisdom*, specifically, thereby identifying Eros with *philosophers*--especially philosophers like Socrates, someone who is always captivating the beautiful young boys with his sharp questions and his "clever pleadings" and tantalizing them with the opportunity to stalk the truth together like the "awesome hunters" they have the potential to be.

Diotima's teachings also include the view that, in humans, the desire to possess the good forever manifests as a desire to reproduce in beauty, because reproduction is the only approximation of immortality and permanence that is afforded to mortals (*Symposium* 207d-208e). Some humans seek bodily reproduction (which begets human children) and others long for reproduction of the soul (which begets virtues and beautiful ideas). Lovesick to reproduce in the presence of beauty, this latter sort is always looking around for a beautiful person with whom to bring virtues to birth (*Symposium* 208e-209e). Then, in a stirring vision of *erotic* ascent, Diotima describes how the *eros* that begins as a desire for the beautiful body of just one person can evolve until one perceives the beauty of all bodies, the beauty of souls, the beauty of the laws, customs, and sciences that cultivate the beauty of souls, and finally, for some, the Beautiful itself (*Symposium* 209e-212b).

The symposiasts' reception of Socrates' speech, as well as any dialogue that might have followed it, is then cut short by a spectacular drunken disruption. Alcibiades, a popular young politician with whom Socrates has history, arrives at the head of a

column of boisterous drunken revelers (*Symposium* 212c-212e). Joining the symposiasts, Alcibiades both completely overcomes their earlier agreement not to drink to excess (declaring himself their marshal and commencing to require them to drink as he directs), and *partially* cooperates with their established program of giving speeches. He will give a speech, but instead of praising the god of Love, he will praise his old flame Socrates (*Symposium* 213e-215a), because Alcibiades claims, much to Socrates' apparent horror, that Socrates would never stand to watch Alcibiades praise anyone or anything but Socrates himself, not even a god.

Alcibiades, who repeatedly assures his fellow symposiasts that his account of is completely truthful, tells tall tales about a nearly inhuman Socrates capable of remarkable self-denial and endurance (*Symposium* 219e-221b). And perhaps Socrates' most remarkable feat of all, at least from Alcibiades' own point of view, is Socrates' total resistance to Alcibiades' charm, physical beauty, and flagrant, socially outrageous attempts to seduce Socrates, an older man (*Symposium* 216c-219e). It seems to be both an outrage and a kind of mortal blow to Alcibiades that Socrates has always dealt with him chastely.

This speech's sheer insouciance may tempt laughter or contempt, but at times Alcibiades betrays a degree of confusion and inner turmoil to which compassion might be the more appropriate response:

My whole life has become one constant effort to escape from [Socrates] and keep away, but when I see him I feel deeply ashamed, because I'm doing nothing about my way of life, though I have already agreed with him that I should. Sometimes, believe me, I think I would be happier if he were dead. And yet I know that if he dies, I'll be even more miserable (*Symposium* 216b-c).

For Alcibiades, Socrates is a humble surface that, infuriatingly, conceals tantalizing secret virtues. These virtues Socrates rarely reveals and will not give away, no matter what Alcibiades offers to yield to Socrates in exchange for instruction in them (*Symposium* 215a-219a).

Meanwhile, Plato is presenting these events in their entirety, through the dialogue's comparatively sedate narrative frame, the outer-most layer of which is the retelling of the symposium by Apollodorus, "present-day" devotee to an even-older Socrates, who says he likes to keep track of everything Socrates does and who recites on request (*Symposium* 173c-174a). Apollodorus got his story of the *Symposium* from Aristodemus, who walked (some of the way) to the party with Socrates, and who was present that night, but who is shown participating so little after he arrives at Agathon's house that most interpreters don't even list him among the symposiasts. After the initial introductory scene, Apollodorus makes a few simple simple interjections from time to time, which remind Plato's audience that we are hearing a story retold. He's clear about the fact that neither he nor Aristodemus are able to recall perfectly everything they witnessed or heard (*Symposium* 178a).

Shame and the Characters of the Symposium

Although my dissertation is not exclusively concerned with the *Symposium's* narrative frame, it seeks to direct new and particular attention to the two characters that compose it. I argue that one reason Plato uses minor characters Apollodorus and Aristodemus to narrate the *Symposium's* dramatic action is because, together with their splashier and more frequently examined cohort, Alcibiades, the three share an unsalutary emotional condition that obstructs their participation in philosophy. I call their shared

condition a kind of obstructive shame, and believe it can be helpfully analyzed and understood by recourse to the poverty and resource dyad that Socrates captures in his symposium speech.

Socrates' speech importantly taught that all philosophers are lovers and that all lovers must coexist with both poverty (*penia*) and resource (*poros*), because lovers always lack what they love (such as Truth or Beauty), or at least lack assurance of keeping it forever, if they've once managed to get hold of it. At least lovers are not all bad, however. They may suffer poverty, but they also have a share in resource. The occasion of Apollodorus, Aristodemus, and Alcibiades' obstructive shame is their very failure to accept these two aspects of the philosophic life at once.

Apollodorus, crank and self-appointed amanuensis to Socrates, doesn't mince words and has little positive to say about anybody, including himself, only Socrates excepted. We observe as much in two ways: First, Apollodorus' conversation partner, the unnamed "friend" who has asked Apollodorus to tell the story of the symposium, seems familiar with Apollodorus and straightforwardly describes him this way:

You'll never change, Apollodorus! Always nagging, even at yourself! I do believe you think everybody--yourself first of all--is totally worthless, except, of course, Socrates. I don't know exactly how you came to be called "the maniac," but you certainly talk like one, always furious with everyone, including yourself--but not with Socrates! (*Symposium* 173d-173e).

Second, the "friend's" opinion is very faithfully borne out in Apollodorus' own bizarre behavior. Apollodorus does seem to care about and take pride in the story he has to tell. In fact, he doesn't just relish telling stories about Socrates to impress his "friend," he seems to relish *telling stories about telling stories about* Socrates, to impress his friend. Why else would he, presumably having just been asked to share the story of

Symposium (though Plato sees fit to leave the question out at first), open the dialogue by saying “In fact, your question does not find me unprepared,” and then delay responding to the actual request by recounting, instead, one of the other times that he was equally well-prepared to answer that question? (*Symposium* 172a). And yet despite the apparent value Apollodorus places on collectible stories about Socrates, he’s not very kind or respectful to his source. Characteristically extreme, Apollodorus says dismissively that Aristodemus was hopelessly smitten with Socrates and “...a real runt of a man, who always went barefoot. He went to the party because, I think, he was obsessed with Socrates--one of the worst cases at that time” (*Symposium* 173b).

In Apollodorus’ anecdote about the last time he told the *Symposium* story, he describes his conversion (of sorts) to philosophy, saying that before Socrates he used to be “the most worthless man on earth” (*Symposium* 173a). Then, so the story goes, Apollodorus went on pleasantly to tell his conversation partner, Glaucon, that, even now, Glaucon is every bit as worthless as Apollodorus ever was (*Symposium* 173a). Regarding his present-day commitment to and appetite for talk of philosophy, Apollodorus reports:

... my greatest pleasure comes from philosophical conversation, even if I’m only a listener, whether or not I think it will be to my advantage. All other talk, especially the talk of rich businessmen like you, bores me to tears, and I’m sorry for you and your friends because you think your affairs are important when really they’re totally trivial. Perhaps, in your turn, you think I’m a failure, and, believe me, I think that what you think is true. But as for all of you, I don’t just *think* you are failures--I know it for a fact” (*Symposium* 173c--173d).

Given how briefly the spotlight falls on Apollodorus in the *Symposium* and how many times he speaks about worthlessness and failure (his own, especially in the past, and that of others) within that short time, it seems likely that either there is something about the immediate dramatic situation that is calling these words to Apollodorus’ mind

(thoughts of Socrates, perhaps, or possibly some suppressed anxiousness about reciting the speeches) or that Apollodorus as a character is simply *preoccupied* with worthlessness and failure. And yet, Apollodorus seems to understand philosophy--or association with Socrates, or both--as things that confer importance and secure value, even personal worth.

Of Aristodemus, arguably we see even less, despite the fact that he actually attends the party. And all that we do see is filtered through Apollodorus' narration. It is worth remembering that this is a character we never "meet in person," and given that Apollodorus would describe Aristodemus with contempt, despite owing to Aristodemus the very story he has to tell, Apollodorus is clearly no kind of unbiased storyteller.

Still, it's interesting that what little we do see or hear about Aristodemus is also governed by a pattern: smallness, inferiority, and dependency. Apollodorus says that Aristodemus was "a real runt of a man" who imitated Socrates' custom by going shoeless (just as *Eros* himself will do in Diotima's *Eros* origin myth). Interestingly, however, in the actual scene that plays out between Socrates and Aristodemus, Socrates is wearing his "fancy sandals" and Aristodemus wants to know why Socrates is "looking so good" (*Symposium* 174a). Thus, *if* Aristodemus' shoelessness in imitation of Socrates is accurately reported by Apollodorus, it may be the case that, at least in some respects, Aristodemus is even more determined to be like Socrates than Socrates is.

Aristodemus isn't just interested in Socrates' good looks, he also seems to want, if possible, to get Socrates to take charge of his social program for the evening. When Socrates asks if Aristodemus would like to come along, Aristodemus "[will] do whatever

you say” (*Symposium* 174a-b). But Aristodemus still isn’t totally comfortable with the situation, unless Socrates gives him countenance:

“Mine is a case of an obvious inferior arriving uninvited at the table of a man of letters. I think you’d better figure out a good excuse for bringing me along, because, you know, I won’t admit I’ve come without an invitation. I’ll say I’m your guest” (*Symposium* 174c).

Socrates is more relaxed and noncommittal: “Let’s go... We’ll think about what to say ‘as we proceed the two of us along the way’” (*Symposium* 174d). Socrates is also the less determined of the two that they should stay together all the way to Agathon’s house. Apparently taken by some idea he never specifically reveals within the course of the dialogue, Socrates keeps disappearing on Aristodemus, hanging back in distracted thought. Aristodemus doesn’t seem to know quite what to make of Socrates’ continual lagging behind to think (when it seems very likely that Aristodemus would strongly prefer Socrates remain alongside him, as both a companion and a social buffer), but when he waits for Socrates, Socrates urges him to go on ahead (*Symposium* 174d-e), causing Aristodemus to “find himself in a very embarrassing situation,” when Agathon’s gate is wide open and he’s too easily spotted arriving alone, after all (*Symposium* 174e).

Aristodemus’ one shining moment comes when Agathon wants to send slaves out to collect Socrates and bring him in from his reverie, and it’s Aristodemus, everywhere else portrayed as meek, who simply won’t let them go interrupt whatever it is Socrates is off thinking about (*Symposium* 175b). In fact, he springs into action twice to prevent anyone *else* interrupting Socrates (*Symposium* 175a, 175c). Aristodemus seems pleased by the opportunity to act on his special friend Socrates’ behalf and to show that he knows Socrates best. (Or, perhaps at the very least, Aristodemus was pleased to report that he did this service for Socrates, when he told his version of the tale).

But surely by far the most curious thing about Aristodemus is what we *don't* ever learn about him: where is his speech in praise of Love? If Aristodemus spoke at the party, why can he recall the speeches of most of the participants but not his own?¹⁶ If he did not speak at the party, why is this accepted, in the narrative, without comment? Though Aristodemus evidently remembers most of the night in beautiful detail, any participation of his own in the evening's philosophically substantive exchange is noticeably absented from the resulting account.

Plato tells us specifically that Aristodemus is seated on the same couch as fellow symposiast Eryximachus (*Symposium* 175a). And when the gentlemen attending the party agree to forego heavy drinking in favor of giving encomia to Love, it is Eryximachus, again, who insists that the speeches be given in seating order and that every man present must speak. Thus, later in the evening, when Aristophanes contracts unstoppable hiccups which compel him to exchange places with Eryximachus, not only can the hiccups make

¹⁶ At 178a, Apollodorus openly discusses the existence of some forgotten speeches which took place in between Phaedrus' turn to speak and Pausanias'. The symposiasts who gave these speeches are so forgotten that we never even learn any of their names or how many of them there were. It's as if they never attended the party at all. By contrast with this open admission of forgetting, however, we get no narrators' explanation for the vanishing speech of Aristodemus. There *is* a narrative incursion at the relevant moment, because Apollodorus has to explain the hiccupping incident and how it affected the speaking order. But despite the fact that the speaking order and the rules are literally under discussion at around the time Aristodemus' speech must be scheduled to take place, anything pertaining to Aristodemus is left out.

As for the forgotten symposiasts in between Phaedrus and Pausanias, I have often wondered if they might symbolize the Greek custom of appeal to Homeric tradition and of repeating poetry rather than analyzing concepts to decide what one thinks about them. Phaedrus strongly favored Homeric references as evidence in his speech. When Pausanias speaks next (only not really next--really after the sequence of forgotten speeches), he responds directly to Phaedrus' speech. It seems as though the speeches in between Phaedrus and Pausanias must have very closely resembled Phaedrus' speech and made few if any enhancements to the corporate treatment of the topic. Because the paradigm established with Phaedrus is still considered dominant, several implied speeches later.

for a comical picture when we imagine them distributed, unsuppressed, throughout Eryximachus' speech, they can also serve to call attention to a second infraction against the original rules (*Symposium* 185c-189d): giving no speech, if that *were* the way it happened, would mean Aristodemus broke those rules. And unlike Aristophanes, who only delayed speaking long enough for his hiccups to subside, as far as the two narrators of the *Symposium* have recorded, it is as if Aristodemus never spoke at all. Mitigating against this latter possibility, however, is Eryximachus' later summary of the evening's events, for the benefit of Alcibiades who has just stumbled in drunk: "We all took our turn--in good order from left to right--and gave our speeches, each according to his ability. You are the only one not to have spoken yet" (*Symposium* 214c). What possibilities remain? Well, this is a narrated story, and if either Apollodorus or Aristodemus wished to vanish something from the narrative, he could do so. Apollodorus might erase Aristodemus' participation from spite or jealousy, but he includes the contributions of other symposiasts, such as Agathon, who are praised by the assembled guests, and who attract Socrates' special attention and apparent affection. If Apollodorus isn't threatened by Agathon's speech or Phaedrus' or Alcibiades', why would he be especially threatened by that of Aristodemus? We cannot possibly know conclusively how it is that the character Aristodemus left no speech, but it seems likelier to me that Aristodemus suppressed it himself (either that, or suppressed the discussion that ensued when he refused to give one, since the absence of Aristodemus' speech is not even acknowledged, whereas the other forgotten speeches and departures from the rules are faithfully catalogued in Apollodorus' report).

Looking over Plato's brief but intense characterizations of Apollodorus and Aristodemus, *Symposium's* narrators, it is striking that their known qualities are either similar or diametrically opposed. Apollodorus is dismissive about Aristodemus' crush on Socrates, but then he too is completely preoccupied with everything Socrates says and does--and he says as much! Both men must also be rather willing to share stories about Socrates. (According to Apollodorus, Aristodemus was also the primary source for the inferior version of the symposium that is sometimes recited by Apollodorus' less-scrupulous narrative rival, Phoenix. So Aristodemus must also have been willing to tell the story more than once). Importantly, both characters also telegraph a self-preoccupation with "worthlessness" or "inferiority" that only seems assuaged by their ties to Socrates.

Yet Apollodorus' *blares* his readiness to the task of rehearsing Socrates's words and foregoes philosophical discussion with his unnamed interlocutor, in favor of lecturing his friend on their corporate "worthlessness," at least apart from philosophy.

Aristodemus, on the other hand, seems likely to have *effaced* himself from any record of participation in his own philosophical story. How did we go from wondering why Aristodemus should even exist as a character of this dialogue to asking how it is that he should vanish from it again?

I interpret these textual curiosities of the narrative frame by looking to the question *why* Plato should choose to begin the dialogue with Apollodorus' assertion of readiness to his task: "In fact, your question does not find me *unprepared*." In response to this question, I suggest that Plato's opening line is the first of many signals that Apollodorus, though he certainly attempts to practice philosophy after a fashion by

acquiring and repeating Socrates' words, is arrested in his philosophical development by a preoccupation with demonstrating his own *resource*. Fleeing from the shadow of a formerly "worthless" life, Apollodorus resorts to the acquisition of arguments and stories, amassing a kind of philosophical capital and then crouching on it like a dragon on his hoard.

Aristodemus, on the other hand, is the disappearing symposiast who exemplifies the foregrounding of poverty. Ashamed of his feelings of inferiority "at the table of a man of letters," Aristodemus vanishes away any contribution he made to the *encomia* at the symposium. This contrast in the narrators' characterizations actually points to their shared problem, a misplaced and obstructive shame in response to their suspension between poverty and resource. And there must be two of them, in order for Plato to sketch both of obstructive shame's polar extremes.

The shame of both narrators may be further and ironically confirmed by their preference for narration over collaborative philosophical engagement. In Socrates' account of Diotima's speech, she is shown arguing that *eros* seeks immortality through reproduction, but not the reproduction of a mere copy:

For among animals the principle is the same as with us, and mortal nature seeks so far as possible to live forever and be immortal. And this is possible in one way only: by reproduction, because it always leaves a *new* young one behind in place of the old" (*Symposium* 207d, emphasis mine).

Of course, Socrates also narrates some Platonic dialogues and is telling a story in the very moment that he makes this comment. Plato is telling a story also. Storytelling isn't inherently inferior philosophy. But Socrates seems to tell stories with a creative philosophic vision in mind. The Diotima story itself has probably been adapted for Socrates' immediate audience, to posit rebuttals to points the symposiasts made just that

night. If I'm right that Socrates hopes his story will have therapeutic power to relieve misplaced shame in response to the philosophic condition, then his story is creatively purposive. Apollodorus and Aristodemus both seem more interested in possessing stories as Socratic relics than they do in connecting with and engaging their audience as persons.

The dynamic and celebrated Alcibiades completes the constellation of shame begun with Apollodorus and Aristodemus. Alcibiades is aware of and foregrounds his poverty when Socrates is present--thus, Socrates is "the only man in the world who has made [him] feel shame" (*Symposium* 216b)--but aware of and foregrounds his personal resource whenever Socrates is gone. Alcibiades wants to believe that the life of political acclaim is a life of profound resource, but he seems deeply anxious that it is, in fact, a life of profound poverty. This vacillation leaves him confused and unstable. Alcibiades' yearning for Socrates to confer wisdom on him is laid painfully bare to the audience. But his subtler inability to transcend his obstructive shame, to coexist with his poverty and his resource at once, precludes his full initiation into the philosophical life.

It's important to acknowledge that this reading of the *Symposium* cannot possibly be conclusively demonstrated, if any reading at all can be. Its best quality is probably that it proposes a pattern which is *interesting*, and which would pull together several seemingly disparate elements of the dialogue, showing they're connected. It's fecund, I think, particularly once the therapeutic potential of Socrates' speech is considered. However, it is impossible entirely to rule out many other possible ways of interpreting these same characters, particularly because my reading depends on the details and descriptions associated with all three, and two of them only ever appear to us as described by the third. Apollodorus' own fixation on Socrates could easily motivate him to

mischaracterize other close friends and associates of Socrates, out of jealousy or spite.

He's not a very balanced individual in the first place, and he might just be a poor judge of character. In short, we can never know if Apollodorus gets Aristodemus or Alcibiades--or Socrates himself--"right."

Indeed, a conventional response to the narrator as literary device has been to suggest that characters who narrate mainly raise questions about perspective and the accuracy of what the audience is told. Certainly even a careful narrator with the best of intentions selects and emphasizes. Neither Apollodorus nor Aristodemus (who's also responsible for the final narrative, we're told) can evade these concerns, and Plato scholars who have bothered to look at Apollodorus and/or Aristodemus at all have tended, for good reason, to react to them with some version of an "unreliable narrator" theory.¹⁷

¹⁷ Examples of unreliable narrator arguments (re: the *Symposium* narrators, that is) can be found in Elizabeth S. Belfiore, *Socrates' Daimonic Art: Love for Wisdom in Four Platonic Dialogues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), and in Clay Diskin, *Platonic Questions: Dialogue with the Silent Philosopher* (Penn State University Press, 2007).

Although *credibility*, as such, is not Rosen's first concern, Rosen's treatment of the *Symposium* narrators also ultimately follows this common literary pattern. He describes the nested narrative as "a recollection within a recollection," and his survey of textual details suggests a dramatic action set at a dreamy, mythic remove. Stanley Rosen, *Plato's Symposium*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press): 2-10. Because Apollodorus never claims to have checked more than part of his account with Socrates and Aristodemus freely admits to eliding certain portions of the evening that he forgot or missed--an unspecified number of omitted early speeches occurring between the speeches of Phaedrus and Pausanias (180C), as well as whatever events took place in the wee hours of the morning (when the party was in its denouement and Alcibiades' program of forced drinking had done in the majority of the symposiasts and made Aristodemus sleepy; 223C)--Rosen observes that we can't know for sure Aristodemus didn't forget more than he says he did or that Apollodorus didn't get something wrong. All true, as I admit above. However, for my own part, I am more interested in the fact that Aristodemus freely admits to some omissions, while there is evidence for at least one notable omission to which he doesn't speak at all.

For a reaction *against* classic unreliable narrator arguments that nonetheless gives reliability of narration pride of place, see Harry Neumann, "On the Madness of Plato's

I cannot demonstrate Apollodorus' reliability, but I can ask a different question about him and his role as narrator, a question that I think connects to the themes of Plato's *Symposium* in a highly interesting way. The basic question of the "unreliable narrator" approach is "What might the narrator be getting wrong?" Meanwhile, I am also interested in the question, "What might the narrator be getting right?" There is a dark irony in the possibility that Apollodorus and Aristodemus jointly do a very good job of telling a story about a lesson they *need* and can even recite but have not really *learned*. The philosopher-lovers of Socrates' speech are searching for kindred spirits with whom they can draw near to Beauty and, together, give birth to beautiful ideas. And yet Socrates is continually surrounded by near-misses at such philosophical kinship. If Socrates' friends can be quite invested in reproducing stories about what he says, and yet those words do not enter into their souls with vitality, helping them to find inclusion in collaborative philosophical activity, then that is a profoundly interesting rhetorical and pedagogical problem for Socrates.

The best evidence that Apollodorus is interested in being a reliable narrator (not that good intentions prevent unreliable narration) is the relationship he seems to desire between himself and Socrates and Socrates' words and deeds. As a character,

Apollodorus," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, vol. 96 (1965): 283-289. Neumann makes more than one very fair point: that the *mania* of Alcibiades at least resembles the madness which, in Plato's *Phaedrus*, can sometimes be divine, for example. And that neither powerful attachment to Socrates nor extremity of personality, alone, should be considered indicators of bad character or unfitness for philosophy. Neumann thinks that not only is Apollodorus' total "contempt for popular values" admirable, it might be a foundational Socratic value. This is a bold view, but it embraces--and admires--a good deal of wild negativity. Apollodorus may be experiencing some kind of *mania* or madness, as in the *Phaedrus*, but the *Phaedrus* makes clear that there are at least as many ways to be overcome by damaging, unbalancing, non-divine forces or attributes as there are divinely-inspired types of madness that confer vision of the Good.

Apollodorus is very keen to convey the dedication with which he stewards all the knowledge about Socrates that he has been able to collect. He will not suffer a “badly garbled” version of the story, like Phoenix’s! To Apollodorus, the *Symposium* likely represents the scope of his mastery overcoming the obstacles posed by intervening years and by a regrettable absence from the scene of the action. Perhaps there has seldom been a fictional narrator whose very sense of identity may be so emphatically bound up with his ability to tell the story correctly. As he not only begins by saying but will remind us all a second time: “as I said before, I’m not unprepared” (*Symposium* 173c).

Meanwhile, although not at all conclusive evidence of Apollodorus’ reliability, the fact that Apollodorus says he has checked at least part of his account with Socrates and that Socrates had no objections to this version *could* serve as a subtle signal that, for Socrates and perhaps for Plato also, mere accuracy is, here, somehow beside the point. Of course, we have this assertion only from Apollodorus himself. But as Apollodorus tells it, Socrates’ endorsement of the account comes across sounding so casual, so utterly unconcerned, that it may be that Socrates doesn’t consider a perfectly precise rendering of the speeches important to the activity of continuing to discuss and evaluate them. If there are errors in some retelling of the speeches, then surely those errors, recounted, will simply place a demand upon the hearer to evaluate the merits and detriments of the ideas and reasoning, just as the hearer would be expected to do for a perfectly accurate rendering or for the original speeches presented in all their immediacy. At any rate, I cannot help but feel that if Apollodorus had achieved accuracy in Socrates’ eyes and Socrates had acted like this accuracy was terribly important to him, it would be terribly important to Apollodorus, too. Instead, we are told that Socrates has put his stamp of

approval on the accuracy of at least some parts of this retelling, but probably not with a great deal of fanfare. These observations will never do away with legitimate unreliable narrator arguments, but they can function as reasons why Apollodorus' and Aristodemus' narrative reliability should neither be considered the limit of analysis of the *Symposium*'s frame or perhaps even the emphasis of such analysis.

Shame Language and the Characters of the Symposium

Of the three afflicted characters I have focused on, Alcibiades is the only one who specifically uses shame language. Nevertheless, shame is present as a subtle theme of the dialogue as a whole. It simply enters the dialogue and is offered for conceptual consideration through the speeches of the symposiasts themselves, rather than through the characters of the narrative frame. In fact, the language of shame enters the *Symposium* explicitly starting with the speech of the very first symposiast: the earnest, young, and unironic Phaedrus. Phaedrus' encomium to Love is an easy-going confidence of superlatives that owes its foundational premises mostly to poetry and convention rather than to any recognizable pre-Socratic philosophic model. Love is one of the very oldest of the gods, and "As such, he gives to us the greatest goods" (*Symposium* 178c).¹⁸

And what is it that Love gives? Phaedrus explains that a boy can depend upon Love to provide guidance concerning good conduct, because Love gives us "a sense of

¹⁸ Phaedrus never explains the relationship between Love's venerable age and the conclusion that Love gives the greatest goods. The argument is represented here with no premises elided (by me, that is), almost exactly as it occurs in the text. Presumably, either this mystifying leap in reasoning is just the first signal of Phaedrus' overall argumentative technique, or, more charitably, perhaps Phaedrus has in mind that with Love's venerable age comes the assurance of wisdom. If so, then Love gives the greatest gifts, because gifts of wisdom and knowledge are greatest, and Love is thus the first teacher.

shame in acting shamefully and a sense of pride in acting well” (*Symposium* 178d). Thus, shame and pride are the chief gifts of Love. From where Phaedrus sits, these emotions are jointly sufficient to point out the way to living well.

Phaedrus credits Love with a boy’s sense of shame, because nothing heightens the sensitivity of our desire for positive regard more than being in love. While in view of a lover or a beloved, we take special care to conduct ourselves as we’d most like to be seen. Phaedrus believes that for our lover or a beloved to witness us acting disgracefully is so profoundly painful that a person in love can be relied upon just to act nobly instead (*Symposium* 178d-179b). Thus, shame, while painful, is also perfectly navigable. We only need to be good.

From Phaedrus’ speaking style, we can tell that airtight arguments are not a very high priority for him, but it is interesting to note that Phaedrus has raised a question about the relationship between love and shame that he does not fully discharge nor, indeed, really seem to have noticed: Phaedrus implies at the outset that love *gives* us shame. But his examples demonstrate only that love between human lovers intensifies our existing sense of shame, so that it’s felt much more keenly. Thus, Phaedrus does not make his case. On the basis of the failure of Phaedrus’ argument, we might conclude that love does not, in fact, give us shame, or we might consider whether Plato would prefer that our interest in Phaedrus’ initial claim persist: is there something about loving that also *creates* and defines our sense of shame?

Above all, Phaedrus’ speech is highly optimistic and never problematizes the relationship between love and shame, taking for granted that the sense of shame is a good and reliable teacher. Phaedrus certainly never seems bothered by his own proposal that,

in love, the whole ruler against which I come to measure my ethical conduct has become the gaze of a single other individual (or perhaps more troubling yet, my *internalized idea* of that other individual's gaze). He trusts that this relationship is for the best. Phaedrus does not seem to worry that shame can be felt disproportionately to its circumstances, that it can be manipulated, that it can occur when it isn't salutary or warranted, or that it can sometimes have the power to obstruct good conduct, rather than promote it. At bottom, Phaedrus takes for granted that good conduct is easy to recognize, easy to perform, and reliably yields approval from others.

Pausanias, the speaker just after Phaedrus, is also interested in love and shame, but he complicates the relationship with shame and the shameful while at the same time continuing to treat it as oversimple. Pausanias asserts that "considered in itself, no action is either good or bad, honorable or shameful" (*Symposium* 181a). Rather, any action can be done in an honorable or shameful *way*. This view has some promise for anyone who believes that there are no acts beyond the pale, but in order to put it to any use, Pausanias would have to do a better job explaining what ways of doing things are the honorable ways. Instead, Pausanias mostly postpones the question. In fact, as Pausanias continues to give examples, what emerges is a picture of fairly unreflective elitism. Acts, which are neither honorable nor shameful in themselves, are done in an honorable way when they are done by the honorable sort of people, before the approving eyes of the honorable sort of culture. And the honorable sort of culture is a culture like Pausanias' culture. And the honorable sort of person is a person like Pausanias, who loves what Pausanias loves and wants to do the same kinds of acts that Pausanias wants to do. For Pausanias, convention is both trustworthy--in that, for example, we can reliably recognize honorable cultures by

their reconditely permissive systems for dealing with Love--and untrustworthy, at the same time--in that even the most complex and reconditely permissive cultures sometimes give a Lover a hard time, despite the fact that acts done for the sake of the Heavenly variety of love should be excused. Ultimately, Pausanias adjudicates this apparent conflict by recourse to his own freedom from “vulgarity.”

The next speaker in the sequence is Eryximachus, though he occupies this position due to events of the dialogue’s dramatic action. Aristophanes’ unconquerable hiccups call for a postponement of his speech, and Eryximachus takes his place as the third recorded speaker. As previously mentioned, the placement of the hiccupping incident can be read as calling attention to Aristodemus’ elided speech, because it highlights and alters the speaking order. Aristodemus’ turn to speak should occur either before or after Eryximachus, and, thus, around the same time that the hiccups interrupt, and Eryximachus and Aristophanes switch places.

A second effect of Eryximachus and Aristophanes switching places, however, is to bring about a structural alignment of the first three recorded speeches (those of Phaedrus, Pausanias, and Eryximachus) and, to a lesser extent, the latter three recorded speeches (those of Aristophanes, Agathon, and Socrates himself) that would not have occurred if Eryximachus and Aristophanes had kept their original spots. Eryximachus, like Pausanias and Phaedrus, mentions shame in his speech, though unlike the previous speakers, Eryximachus does not strongly emphasize it. In fact, the most explicit mention of shame in Eryximachus’ speech occurs when he is simply pointing out his agreement with Pausanias’ earlier claim that “it is as honorable to yield to a good man as it is shameful to consort with the debauched” (*Symposium* 186c).

Though Eryximachus affirms this view introduced by his predecessor, however, he also plans to surpass it. Pausanias acknowledged the existence of a distinction between honorable and shameful love, and he described the lot of a gentleman and lover who must navigate the distinction between the two. From his capacity as a trained physician, however, Eryximachus promises to do more than to distinguish or tolerate the two kinds of love. Eryximachus speaks as one who believes that his particular expertise empowers him to overmaster the honorable and the shameful affinities, which are expressed, he says, not just in the intercourse between persons but in the functioning of the body and in the movements of the universe. Eryximachus claims he can actually create salutary love and stamp out the shameful and unsalutary kind (*Symposium* 186c-e).

Thus, there is an important sense in which Eryximachus' speech is akin to its two predecessors, despite the diminishment of its explicit emphasis on shame. Eryximachus shares the overweening self-satisfaction of the previous two speakers and their confidence that they know how to master shame and love.

Phaedrus' view of shame betrayed his youthful optimism that civic and social institutions, as we find them, are sufficient to provide a boy with all the education he needs, simply through the application of love and shame. Phaedrus takes for granted that he can rely upon society to correctly to identify the shameful, and that a boy can evade the pain of shame through good behavior. Phaedrus' speech was untroubled by questions about misplaced or obstructive shame, just as by any mention of Love's unfulfilled longing.

Pausanias' speech showed that he is aware of the complexity--the contradictions even--of civic customs attaching to the honorable and the shameful. If Phaedrus is a

character perhaps too young to have found himself the victim of social misunderstanding, then Pausanias' speech suggests the resentment of an older person who, finding little fault in his own conduct, has arrived at the conclusion that society sometimes deals misplaced, even arbitrary shame.

But Pausanias is still like Phaedrus in his overconfidence. He may not assume a simple, intelligible, and unilateral social code for avoiding shame the way Phaedrus has done, but he still trusts himself to be the measure of the honorable and shameful. Pausanias shows that he believes shame can be misplaced, but he can explain away any shame directed at himself.

Eryximachus' claims to mastery over shame exceed those even of the other two. Eryximachus does not seriously take up the question whether he should be shamed or has anything to feel ashamed of. For Eryximachus, the condition of the soul and the condition of the body are either one and the same, or so similar in their operations that his claims to professional knowledge about--and control over--the body become claims to similar control over the soul.

With the transition to Aristophanes and Agathon, this escalating sense of simple mastery over shame dissipates, but not in the sense that either Aristophanes or Agathon shows how to approach shame more humbly. If anything, it might be more accurate to say that the simplicity and confidence of the first three speakers is succeeded by a new and different arrogance. Aristophanes and Agathon will both mention shame, but unlike the previous symposiasts, not as any load-bearing concern of their *encomia* to Love. When Agathon mentions shame, in fact, it is not even a part of his speech.

Though Aristophanes himself certainly never says so, his speech might easily be described as poverty-driven, telling as it does the poignant tale of ancient, doubled human beings whose ambition the gods punished by splitting the once-unified beings apart from each other, and who therefore no longer ever feel quite whole (*Symposium* 190d-191b). We half-creatures search needfully for our corresponding halves, in the hope that if we find each other we will be able to wind ourselves together, pressing so closely that we almost manage to make a new whole. Surely this is an image of terrible poverty--and irreducible poverty, too, given that love drives us to seek an approximation of healing and relief that can never be realized in this lifetime. "This, then, is the source of our desire to love each other," Aristophanes explains. "Love is born into every human being; it calls back the halves of our original nature together; it *tries* to make one out of two and heal the wound of human nature" (*Symposium* 191d, emphasis mine). Aristophanes' speech shows that he does understand loneliness; it begins to anticipate the speech of Socrates by finally admitting into the discourse the longing and desiring aspect of love.

Nevertheless, while the poverty of Aristophanes' speech may begin in compassion for the doubled humans, it seems to descend into cynicism and mockery. As I read the speech, the turn to mocking lovers (as opposed to simply picking out humorous elements in their story) occurs when Aristophanes brings up shame, not to develop a point of sincere importance to himself, but likely to poke fun at Pausanias (in particular), other coupled symposiasts, their self-congratulatory masculinity, and their anxiousness to be found pleasing in the eyes of their lovers. Aristophanes says:

People who are split from a male are male-oriented. While they are boys, because they are chips off the male block, they love men and enjoy lying with men and being embraced by men; those are the best of boys and lads, because they are the most manly in their nature. Of course, some say such

boys are shameless, but they're lying. It's not because they have no shame that such boys do this, you see, but because they are bold and brave and masculine, and they tend to cherish what is like themselves... In every way, this sort of man grows up as a lover of young men and a lover of Love, always rejoicing in his own kind (*Symposium* 192a-b).

Following this turn to mockery of the earlier symposiasts' values, Aristophanes takes his melancholy, yearning tale toward what actually seems a subtly spiteful and discomfiting conclusion, when he asks the assembled couples: if the god Hephaestus were to appear to them right now and offer them the chance to be fastened together again forever, wouldn't they accept immediately? Wouldn't it be everything they wanted? (*Symposium* 192d-e).

An awkward moment, perhaps, for the paired symposiasts present. Of course, most would, in fact, find this prospect frightening and alarming. Thus the poverty of Aristophanes' speech is doubled: with the longing, on the one hand, of the loveless, incomplete, and divided people, and the suggestion of dissatisfaction (or horror) at imperfectly realized unity, on the other. Aristophanes' use of shame language to poke fun at the other symposiasts ultimately does not reveal his own disposition (or lack thereof) to experiencing shame.

Agathon's speech contrasts with Aristophanes' poverty-driven speech by attributing to Love (and too himself by likeness, as noted in Nichols) the full flower of youth, beauty, artistry, and virtue. This is more than "resource," more than the ingenuity and spirit that balance poverty in the *Eros* myth. This is a perfection of poetic and divine attributes. Socrates will complain afterward that the precedent set by Agathon's speech means Socrates must not know how to praise Love, at all. Because Socrates thought praising Love would mean saying what Love is really like and valuing those properties,

but Alcibiades has praised Love by “[applying] to the object the grandest and most beautiful qualities, whether he actually has them or not” (*Symposium* 198e).

A speech of this kind would seem a strange place to look for shame, and, where shame language is concerned there is none. Instead, Socrates and Agathon discuss Agathon’s sense of shame before Agathon even begins. Agathon seems anxious and annoyed to give a performance in front of Socrates and the other guests, when his current reputation and honors make for high expectations. Socrates prods Agathon to consider whether the evening’s activity will be any different for him than putting on his own play before the Athenian *demos*. Agathon thinks it will be. Because one feels most susceptible in front of “a few sensible men much more frightening than a senseless crowd” (*Symposium* 194b). Socrates thinks it will not be, because the sensible men in question were members of that crowd, and because shame, he suggests, shouldn’t be audience-dependent. Agathon has agreed he would be ashamed to do “something ugly” in front of intelligent people. “On the other hand, you wouldn’t be ashamed to do something ugly in front of ordinary people. Is that it?” (*Symposium* 194d).

Though it does not discuss shame, the speech that follows is arguably shame (or at least embarrassment) driven. Beginning with the pedantic opening line, “I wish first to speak of how I ought to speak, and only then to speak,” Agathon’s speech, though it pleases and delights in the end, seems like a way to evade being compared to others by not putting in a serious effort. Instead, Agathon uses his speech to tease and flirt with Socrates, reminding him the Love favors the young and beautiful (like Agathon himself), never the old and homely (like Socrates). If Agathon’s praise of Love is actually, fundamentally disingenuous, then it is possible he has, after all, done something ugly and

shameful in front of his guests, no matter how sensible or senseless they truly are, by speaking irresponsibly and with no love for the truth, in order to avoid any serious scrutiny by the other guests.

No doubt much more could be said about each of these speeches and about their sequence as a totality, but for the present purpose, let this brief summary serve to illustrate the pervasive presence of shame language throughout Plato's *Symposium*. In what remains, I will focus more on the dramatization of shame that I believe occurs within the dialogue. But the language of shame to be found in the speeches of the symposiasts provides force of corroboration to the idea that shame is a theme Plato is consciously dramatizing in this text.

CHAPTER TWO

Shame and Refutation in Plato's *Gorgias*

The Gorgias as a Widely-Read Text on Shame in Plato

If, as I've argued in the previous chapter, the dramatic situation of Plato's *Symposium* can coherently and fruitfully be read as a depiction of Socrates' attempt to give a therapeutic response to a kind of misplaced shame that has obstructed his friends' participation and progress in the philosophical life, then shame was a topic of concern to Plato, although it has not been a major concern in Plato scholarship. The purpose of this chapter is to examine one way that Plato scholarship has attempted to capture Plato's relationship with shame: specifically, by arguing that Plato crafted the *Gorgias* to point out his advocacy of a particular kind of civically salutary shaming. In this chapter and the next, I will argue that while it is very likely that Plato and his character Socrates both believe there are times when it is appropriate for a person to feel ashamed, and while each of them *may* believe that there are also times when it is appropriate to shame another person, (1) the textual evidence in favor of the conclusion that Plato *advocates* shaming in the *Gorgias* is by no means as conclusive as it may initially seem, and (2) there is good reason to think that the question whether Plato advocates shaming is not actually the most fruitful question we could pursue for the sake of understanding shame's role in Plato.¹

As discussed in the previous chapter, cues to pay attention to the theme of shame certainly *can* be found in the language of the *Symposium*, but they are subtle, scattered,

¹ Throughout the dissertation, except where specifically noted, I will appeal to: Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. W.C. Hembold, (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1997).

and do not always announce themselves.² Thus, at present, the *Symposium* has not been widely recognized as a particularly good or obvious source of insight into Plato's views on shame. Recognizing the *Symposium* as a significant text on the role of shame in Plato requires cultivating attention not only to its explicit instances of shame language, but also to the way shame features in its dramatic situation and, in particular, Plato's characterization of the dialogue's eccentric nested-narrators.

The *Gorgias*, by contrast, has been more widely accepted as a good source for insight into Plato's views on shame. Although the number of references to shame in the *Gorgias* is roughly on par with the number of references in the *Symposium*, occurrences of shame in the *Gorgias* form a more immediately striking pattern. To be specific, the *Gorgias* depicts Socrates dialectically engaging a sequence of main interlocutors, each of whom overtakes the previous interlocutor while complaining that his predecessor was shamed into conceding at least one premise he didn't really mean, even to the point of being "bound and gagged by [Socrates] in the discussion, too ashamed to say what he thought" (*Gorgias* 482e).³ Once each interlocutor is overtaken by his successor, he never returns to equal prominence in the dialogue.⁴ These accusations against Socrates by the

² The shame that Alicibiades reports feeling in response to Socrates (at 216b and 219d, for example), is the occurrence of the theme most widely recognized as significant.

³ See also *Gorgias* 461b-c and 482-c-d. This particular phrasing comes from the Zeyl translation: Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. Donald J. Zeyl, in *Plato. Complete Works*, ed. J. Cooper, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 791-870.

Hembold has it, somewhat less vividly, that "being ashamed to say what he really thought, [Polus] had his mouth gagged" (*Gorgias* 482e).

⁴ *Gorgias* will come back long enough to utter a few more lines, first at 463e and then at 506a. Arguably, his continued (though upstaged) presence in the dialogue mitigates against the reading I critique in this chapter.

interlocutors of the *Gorgias* raise questions about the role of shame in an elenctic exchange: *Has* Socrates, in fact, shamed the interlocutors of the *Gorgias*? And if he has, should we approve or mimic these acts of shaming? If the Socratic elenchus were essentially shaming, would that be a reason why we either should or should not adopt a Socratic style of pedagogy?⁵

Shame also explicitly features in the *Gorgias* when Socrates and Callicles, (the most openly aggressive and the last of the three main interlocutors in the sequence), come to open disagreement over what is disgraceful and under what circumstances Socrates himself should feel disgraced. If Socrates' alleged shaming of the *Gorgias* interlocutors is, as I will argue, actually left ambiguous, Callicles' attempted belittlement of Socrates for practicing philosophy beyond boyhood, (the age Callicles considers it becoming to ask questions), is much more explicit (*Gorgias* 484a-486e). Callicles openly declares his disrespect, even disgust, for Socrates' way of life, because Socrates has not moved on from childish inquiry to the more 'adult' pursuits of Athenian public life, particularly the statesmanship that Callicles himself prizes.

⁵ I follow Scott in thinking that when Socrates denies he is a teacher, Socrates has in mind a paid teacher, such as a teacher of sophistry (like Protagoras) or of rhetoric (like Gorgias). See Gary Alan Scott, *Plato's Socrates as Educator*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000). More importantly for this immediate context, however: Insofar as we, as Plato's reading audience, have an interest in looking to Socrates as a model of imitable pedagogical techniques, Socrates manifestly has a pedagogy. That is, we could decide to agree that Socrates does not see himself as someone trying to teach anything to anyone at all, and this observation would provide a good reason to go easy on Socrates when he fails to teach. But in the moment when we are considering Socrates' methods in light of their efficacy or inefficacy as teaching tools (without regard for Socrates' own exact intentions for the use of these tools), there is definitely such a thing as a Socratic pedagogy.

The most extensive examination of shame's role within the *Gorgias* has been conducted by Christina H. Tarnopolsky. In the last decade or so, a thicket of discourse on the role of shame in Plato has grown up around her writings on the subject, in which she appeals to the dramatic action of the *Gorgias* as evidence, first, that Plato acknowledges more than one variety of shame, and second, that Plato would agree there is at least one variety of shame which plays a salutary and praiseworthy role in personal growth and in civic life. For Tarnopolsky, the *Gorgias* functions as good evidence that both Plato and Socrates advocate "respectful shaming," though she believes Plato's own unique species of "respectful shame" further trumps the similar but non-identical Socratic variety.

Tarnopolsky's optimism about shaming as an important force in the health and life of the individual and of the city is in some tension with the concerns about shame that, I have argued, are evinced by the language and dramatic situation of the *Symposium*. Of course, it would be perfectly possible for Plato to give limited approval to the practice of shaming while retaining (and dramatizing in one or more of his dialogues) serious concerns about *misplaced* shame, especially where that shame obstructs or discourages participation in philosophy. The two views are not at all mutually exclusive. However, I believe that closer inspection of the *Gorgias*, the focal text on which Tarnopolsky's view of shame in Plato is predicated, actually better supports a view of shame in Plato that dovetails with and corroborates my reading of the *Symposium*, rather than significantly contrasting with it.

In Chapter Three, the chapter to follow this one, I will argue that when the *Symposium*, the *Gorgias*, and a third dialogue, the *Phaedrus*, are studied together rather than separately, they sketch a pattern in Plato's thought whereby shame is, in fact,

repeatedly dramatized and investigated alongside *eros* and rhetoric. And I will propose an interpretation of shame's role in Plato that unites these three concepts, using insights drawn from these three texts. In the present chapter, however, I focus on reasons internal to the *Gorgias* why I believe this current dominant and most thoroughly elaborated view of shame in Plato makes helpful strides but is ultimately not sufficiently responsive to the nuances of the Platonic text from which it is derived.

An Overview of the Gorgias

Plato's *Gorgias* is a dialogue in which Socrates asks proponents of rhetoric to define what they practice and especially to explain what rhetoricians know or accomplish that no other practitioner does. The eponymous Gorgias is a prominent teacher of rhetoric and an outsider to Athens. Gorgias has come to visit Socrates' city, where he has many admirers, and he is situated in the house of the Athenian Callicles, surrounded by his own students and by Athenian enthusiasts. Socrates' friend Chaerephon optimistically expects that Socrates will be eager to receive wisdom from Gorgias, so he brings the two together (*Gorgias* 447b).

Socrates and Chaerephon come too late for Gorgias' main "declamation," but arrive in time to take advantage of Gorgias' standing promise that he can give an answer to any question on any subject (*Gorgias* 447c-448a). Though Socrates blames Chaerephon for their lateness, this outcome does not actually seem to displease him. First of all, Socrates wonders whether Gorgias can now be convinced "just to talk with us?" rather than giving another elaborate, formal rhetorical presentation (*Gorgias* 447c). And second of all, the circumstances present Socrates with an opportunity to get at what he most wants to know. "What I really want," he says, "is to learn from [Gorgias] the power

of his art, and what it is that he professes to teach. The rest of his performance he may, as you suggest, deliver at some other time” (*Gorgias* 447b-c). That Socrates chooses to ask Gorgias to explain his own profession might be read as anything from the gentlest possible underhand pitch (asking an expert about his very area of expertise) to as a cruel set-up antecedent to a public disgrace. If Gorgias cannot define rhetoric and explain how it is that he teaches it, then not only does he fail to answer a question, but he fails to answer a question about the topic he should know best of all.

Although Gorgias is one of the most civil Socratic interlocutors, the discussion does not proceed smoothly. While questioning him, Socrates seems to be trying to convey to Gorgias what properties a really useful definition of rhetoric would have: (1) It would clearly distinguish rhetoric from all other arts (*Gorgias* 449d-450b), (2) It would specify what unique knowledge rhetoricians possess (*Gorgias* 455b-c), (3) It would be topical and succinct (*Gorgias* 448d and 449b-c), and (4) It would explain how rhetoric reliably benefits souls, adds to virtue, and avoids error and injustice. Despite an ostensibly cooperative spirit, Gorgias struggles to notice or capitalize on these dialectical opportunities. He and his young student Polus seem especially distracted by an eagerness to convey, instead, the supremacy of rhetoric--that it is fine and noble and gentlemanly, perhaps the best discipline of them all (*Gorgias* 448c, 451b).⁶

⁶ At 462c, Socrates reprimands Polus for his continual eagerness to leap ahead to questions about rhetoric’s value, without first giving a satisfactory definition: “How do you mean, Polus? Have you already so thoroughly learned from me what I say rhetoric *is* that you can ask the next question, ‘Don’t you think it is fine?’” (emphasis mine).

Over the course of the conversation, Socrates readily concedes that rhetoric is influential and persuasive (*Gorgias* 453a).⁷ But he retains noticeable reservations about whether rhetoric is well-informed. In matters of ship-building or of city defense, Socrates wonders, should we consult someone skilled in persuasion, or someone who is an expert on building ships or on defending cities?

On occasions when the city holds a meeting for the purpose of electing state-physicians or shipwrights or any other kind of master-worker, surely the rhetorician will then refrain from giving his advice? For obviously in all cases like this it is imperative to elect the ablest craftsman. And when walls are to be built, or harbors or docks to be constructed, not the rhetorician but the master-builders will give advice. And again, when counsel is needed about the choice of generals or the disposition of troops against the enemy, or the occupation of hostile territory, military experts will give the advice, not rhetoricians. Or what would you say about such cases, Gorgias? Since you profess yourself to be an orator and to qualify others as speakers, it is only proper to learn from you what pertains to your art... ‘What benefit shall we have, Gorgias, if we attend your lectures? What are the matters in which we shall be able to advise the state?’ (*Gorgias* 455a-d).

Although this penetrating line of questioning does stand to have an adverse effect on Gorgias’ career, I nonetheless read the Socrates of the *Gorgias* as an opportunity creator, who would like an effective and enlightening definition of rhetoric to emerge from within the conversation. But because Gorgias remains either unwilling or inapt to explain rhetoric in a way that fulfills Socrates’ suggested conditions for a good definition, Socrates eventually ventures that, *on the basis of what Gorgias has been able to tell him*, Socrates thinks rhetoric must not be an art, at all (*Gorgias* 462e-463a). The model of true arts (and their ineffectual, irrational mere-imitators, “knacks”) that Socrates subsequently gives, could perhaps be interpreted as meant powerfully to undermine all claims that rhetoric could ever be practiced artfully, *or*, as is far more likely in my view, as providing

⁷ In fact, Socrates actually helps Gorgias to this point!

Gorgias with still more hints about how he could define rhetoric in a way that would satisfy Socrates and vindicate the discipline's value for the city and the soul. After all, by explaining what he sees as the difference between a true art and a non-art, Socrates has empowered Gorgias and his cohorts to show that rhetoric can have the properties of a true art, instead.

Perhaps unfortunately for the conclusiveness and corporate efficacy of the discourse that follows, however, the interlocutors of the *Gorgias* seem to interpret Socrates' response to Gorgias' efforts as a bona fide attack on rhetoric-as-concept. Moreover, two of the three main interlocutors to engage with Socrates show very open reluctance to define rhetoric in a way that *would* explain its value in terms of civic or individual justice, or of reliably and knowledgeably benefiting the audience. Gorgias is upstaged by his student, Polus, who reports that Gorgias has been shamed into disingenuous premises and then takes Gorgias' place as the dialogue's new chief interlocutor (*Gorgias* 461b-c). Then, not very long afterward, it happens again, and Polus himself is supplanted by Callicles (the gathering's Athenian host). With each new interlocutor, the dialogue becomes more combative (with some lapses into passive aggression). Polus is overeager, reluctant to slow down and thoroughly examine the links in his reasoning. He sees no reason why rhetoric should *not* be appreciated solely for its influence, the power of a rhetor to get more of the things he wants. Callicles, meanwhile, expresses outright contempt for Socrates and his project to discover how rhetoric can add to civic and individual virtue. In Callicles' eyes, this project is bankrupt, because the most authentic minds are comfortable in the knowledge that rhetoric really aims at producing advantage, not virtue. For Callicles, the natural order favors the best and/or the

strongest, and although he struggles to define the superiority in question to Socrates' satisfaction, presumably Callicles views rhetoric as a form of verbal strength by which to overpower opponents and would-be detractors.

Callicles complains that it is disgraceful of Socrates to continue to practice philosophy at Socrates' age. Grown men should have left off focus on learning and inquiry and be focused, instead, on achievement. Achievement and efficacy are the means by which a man establishes his reputation, pursues mighty pleasures, and secures what he values against harm. Socrates and Callicles reveal irreconcilable differences: Socrates is unwilling to enter into statesmanship and legislation until he possesses secure knowledge and can therefore be confident that he legislates in such a way as to improve the city and its souls. Callicles disapproves of such a postponement, because he believes the mature gentleman has left off knowledge-seeking and is ready to direct others.

Ultimately, although they agree about some characteristics of rhetoric, the interlocutors of the *Gorgias* never arrive at consensus about how it should be defined. This outcome might be taken to signal Plato's fear or conviction that rhetoric does not actually benefit souls and is therefore not, in fact, an art. On the other hand, the specific character of the interlocutors' failure might be taken to point to a superior way-forward, one that might be discovered by Plato's audience though it was either missed or rejected by the characters of the dialogue. By attending to what, specifically, Socrates indicates that the interlocutors of the *Gorgias* get wrong, we discover hints about how their proposed definition(s) of rhetoric might be modified to Socrates' satisfaction.

On the Merits and Contributions of Tarnopolsky's Approach to Shame in Plato

Christina H. Tarnopolsky's reading of the *Gorgias* is offered as evidence that (1), Plato would say there is more than one variety of shame and of shaming, and therefore that (2), shame, taken as a monolith, is neither essentially edifying nor essentially harmful to the person or the *polis*. She interprets the *Gorgias* as mounting a Platonic defense for--and ultimately advocating--acts of "respectful shaming," in addition to providing textual cues that would distinguish the healthy, "respectful" variety of shame she sees as embraced by both Socrates and Plato from an unhealthy, "flattering" variety of shame. "Flattering shame," for Tarnopolsky, actually names a *disposition* in the person, not just an occurrent emotion. This disposition is characteristic of the sort of minds that create and/or seek out mainly flattering rhetoric, as opposed to creating and/or seeking out truthful (and perhaps sometimes cutting) speech. Flattering shame prompts an individual to hide from pain by retreating into civic discourse that merely soothes, or that suggests an easy but false accord between citizens. However "flattering shame" can also be stigmatizing toward outsiders who do not belong to its mutual admiration society.

Tarnopolsky believes that "respectful shame," by contrast, honors the core Athenian democratic value⁸ of frankness (*parrhesia*) and is either closely tied to refutation or is actually identified with it.⁹ We are respectfully shaming others with our speech when we correct them truthfully, for the sake of the justice of their souls. And

⁸ Tarnopolsky's argument against the view that Plato summarily disapproves of Democracy--that Athenian democratic virtues are praised in the Platonic dialogues--is one of the highlights of her work.

⁹ Christina H. Tarnopolsky, *Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants: Plato's Gorgias and the Politics of Shame* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010), 98, 38.

though we may deal pain in doing so, the Socrates of the *Gorgias* would say that experiencing such pain is much to be preferred to one's soul remaining in a state of injustice and dire unhealth. In fact, it does seem sensible to say that if we must choose between truth-speaking with the attendant possibility (or even likelihood) of causing shame, and flattery for the sake of avoiding shame, there is no question that shame is, after a fashion, politically requisite. Tarnopolsky will ultimately work to distinguish separate practices of Socratic and Platonic shaming (both of which, she believes, we discover in the *Gorgias*),¹⁰ but both share the quality of being "respectful," in that both shame in accordance with the Athenian democratic ideal of frankness (*parrhesia*), despite the possibility or likelihood that frank speech may hurt. The style of shaming that she attributes to Plato, which she believes absorbs the pleasures of Gorgianic rhetoric while retaining the frank refutation of the Socratic paradigm, receives her highest honors.

I believe Tarnopolsky's concerted attention to shame in *The Gorgias* yields useful insights and interpretive tools, but ultimately leaves key textual features of the *Gorgias* and of shame in Plato, more generally, unexplored or under-accounted-for. It is my view that further attention to these textual features calls into question the conclusiveness of the view of shame that Tarnopolsky attributes to Plato. In what follows, I will lay out the merits of Tarnopolsky's case, but I will ultimately argue that there are reasons both internal and external to the *Gorgias* for doubting that Tarnopolsky's view of refutation as respectful shaming adequately speaks to Plato's meaning or provides a particularly helpful analysis of Socratic pedagogy.

¹⁰ Ibid., 41-46.

Shame and Truth-telling

Some of Tarnopolsky's better insights have to do with relationships between shame, truth-telling, and self-discovery within the *polis*. First of all, Tarnopolsky argues that shame has the positive potential to call attention to an individual's values. Because shame involves a sense of inadequacy, and inadequacy measures the person unfavorably against some value or ideal, the experience of shame points backward toward something that the shamed person is perceiving as good and/or important. Experiencing unexpected shame can open a new avenue of self-discovery. Experiencing persistent shame can reveal the corresponding persistence of some value. Experiencing especially keen shame can, perhaps, show depth of value. Experiencing misplaced shame can reveal a false value which we might rather disown. One can retain concerns about many of the potential civic and personal benefits which Tarnopolsky may be overly hasty in crediting specifically to shame while still very much affirming this worthwhile point: when shame occurs, it has the potential to add to self-knowledge.

Even more interestingly, Tarnopolsky suggests that shame can reveal *shared* values.¹¹ One healthy response to shaming, for example, would be the realization that I likely share some internalized value in common with the one who shamed me. Something he at least purports to value (otherwise he would be less likely to bother to measure me against it), I must value also, or the failing measurement would not cause me pain. Since it's possible to experience shame in response to values at least one of us might rather disown, and since it's not clear how often this potential response to the pain of shame will actually be chosen, it's hard to say how often this possibility creates kinship between

¹¹ Ibid.

individuals or groups within the *polis*. But it is a fine point to observe that there will be some instances when shaming has at least the potential to be *unitive*.

Tarnopolsky also argues that Plato intends the *Gorgias* not to condemn democracy outright (as has traditionally been argued) but to show how Athenian democracy has betrayed one of its own core values, *parrhesia*, translated “frankness” or “candor.” Tarnopolsky blames the disposition to flattering shame for this civic failure, but believes respectful shame honors *parrhesia*.

Definitional Work

Tarnopolsky also helpfully discusses the way shame-language appears in the original Greek. The Classical Greeks had two primary words for shame, *aidos* and *aischune*. In an earlier age of etymological evolution, *aidos* was once reserved for the sort of awed self-abasement--the feeling of smallness--that one experiences in the presence of, for example, a god. *Aischune*, by contrast, was used to describe the more familiar transactions of shame that take place routinely between ordinary individuals of comparable social standing. By Plato’s time, however, the two words no longer maintained such distinct meaning and usage and were used interchangeably.¹²

Tarnopolsky affirms that Plato follows his peers in this respect.¹³ One consequence of this etymological state of affairs is that the feeling of smallness in the presence of greatness no longer has its own specially-reserved term, and could be less overtly denoted when it occurs in the text.

¹² Ibid., 11.

¹³ Ibid.

Importantly, however, Tarnopolsky's treatment of the Classical Greek language for shame has an additional, auxiliary component. Though she calls *aidos* and *aischune* the two words which actually denote shame and never goes so far as to claim there is actually a third, Tarnopolsky does say that *elenchus*, or refutation, is a term that can also be translated "disgrace" or "put to shame".¹⁴

I see no reason to take issue with this observation, as such. It stands to reason that refutation and shaming might be closely related concepts and experiences. From a certain point of view, however judicious or injudicious that point of view may be, and however much or little Plato or his character Socrates may have identified with it, a refutation can be said to have a winner and a loser: the one who is refuted has been brought low, and the refuter gets on top. But eventually, without significant further defense of the move in question, Tarnopolsky will come to the conclusion that where refutation occurs, shaming occurs also. I will argue that within the text of the *Gorgias* this substitution poorly withstands scrutiny.

A second aspect of Tarnopolsky's definitional work concerns pointing out and distinguishing a few different ways that we use words about shame. (According to Tarnopolsky, the ancient Greeks were apt to treat these several senses of shame every bit as interchangeably as English speakers do). First of all, there is what she calls the "occurrent experience of shame," which is a specific incident of painful emotion. According to Tarnopolsky's definition, when I feel the pain of shame, it is because I perceive that a personal inadequacy of mine has been and/or will be exposed to the gaze

¹⁴ Ibid., 38.

of an actual, imagined, or internalized other.¹⁵ One of the most interesting features of this definition--and, I would agree, of the occurrent experience of shame itself--is that it picks out shame as an emotion which may be felt as keenly in anticipation of exposure to the assessing gaze of the other as when the exposure is perceived to be immediately at hand.¹⁶ Because I can carry my imagined or internalized “other” with me and sustain him in his capacity to deal me further pain without much, if any, confirming input from an actual other, shame has remarkable power to persist (even to a highly unhealthy and counter-productive degree), and can be remarkably difficult to avoid inspiring in others regardless of our rhetorical intentions.

Tarnopolsky strongly implies not only that the occurrent experience of shame can be edifying for the one who feels it, and is at least sometimes, in fact, a necessary feature of healthy civic discourse (due to its close ties to frankness/*parrhesia*), but that the occurrent experience of shame is simply part and parcel of experiencing refutation, (which surely *is* often edifying and very likely *is* a crucial contributor to personal growth and healthy civic discourse, as we find them).¹⁷ And because Tarnopolsky thinks refutation occasions shame, her confidence that the occurrent experience of shame can be edifying yields equal confidence that Plato and his character Socrates model (and implicitly advocate) “acts of shaming,” a second sense of the word “shame” that she

¹⁵ Christina H. Tarnopolsky, *Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants: Plato’s Gorgias and the Politics of Shame* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010), 153.

¹⁶ Either that, or we might say that shame is never properly anticipatory, because it can create its own inadequacy-exposing gaze, without the benefit of any real audience before which the inadequacy stands to be exposed.

¹⁷ To whatever extent we reject a refutation-based pedagogy, surely it is a matter of degree, rather than a wholesale disapproval of *all* refutation?

distinguishes in her analysis. Interestingly, Tarnopolsky defines “acts of shaming” as any acts that produce “occurrent experiences of shame” and does not mention the intention of the agent. Thus, it seems I may perform an act of shaming without meaning to shame anyone at all.

Nonetheless, Tarnopolsky *is* interested in Socrates’ intent. Since she views the *Gorgias* fairly straightforwardly as a sequence not merely of refutations but of deliberate attempts by Socrates to produce shame in his interlocutors, her reading of the text includes--and, to some extent, relies upon--the claims that (1) Gorgias, Polus and Callicles are all shamed by Socrates, (2) that Socrates intends this result, and (3) that Plato considers such an intention to shame politically and socially laudable, so long as the shame is “respectful shame,” (though the specifically-Platonic style of respectful shaming has praiseworthy characteristics over and above the style of respectful shaming exhibited by Socrates). If every instance of refutation implies that the refuted one has been shamed, and if practicing refutation implies that one seeks to shame others, then so long as we agree that Socrates *has* refuted Gorgias, Polus and Callicles, the *Gorgias* alone is sufficient evidence that (1) and (2) are correct.

Finally, Tarnopolsky’s definitional work on shame picks out a third, dispositional “sense of shame.” The “sense of shame,” for Tarnopolsky, is an emotional pattern or disposition within the individual that describes how often he feels shame, how intensely, and in response to what sorts of stimuli. The perhaps confusingly-named “flattering shame,” which avoids both telling the truth and hearing the truth for the sake of avoiding pain, is a disposition--a species of the sense of shame, rather than an occurrent experience

of shame or an act of shaming. Respectful shame, by contrast, is a name for a type of shaming.

This definitional work represents a worthwhile beginning, but leaves some significant room for collaborative revision. For one thing, Tarnopolsky's definition of occurrent shame may be somewhat too broad, since it specifies only that one experiences emotional *pain* at the thought of one's inadequacies being exposed before an actual, imagined, or internalized other. While I think this is true about the occurrent experience of shame, it does seem probable that other painful, occurrent emotional states can fit this same description. For example, I might feel angry or resentful at the thought of the other scrutinizing my character and finding me wanting, focusing on the offensiveness of the other's gaze and thereby relocating my attention away from my own sense of inadequacy. Or I might feel fearful at the thought of my inadequacies being exposed, especially before an actual other, though perhaps there is also a special sense of dread that's felt when, attempting to remain in a state of denial, for example, I sense a looming, oncoming negative adjustment in my self-concept relation with an internalized other; I am afraid of and attempting to postpone the moment when, I sense, my self-assessment will change significantly for the worse. These are examples of emotional pains experienced in response to the thought of a personal inadequacy exposed to the gaze of a real, imagined, or internalized other. Normally, we might not prefer think of anger and fear as indistinct from and interchangeable with shame, however. This could be a sign that the definition is too broad.

Perhaps this potential objection *might* be mostly-mollified by maintaining special and acute attention to the definitional importance of the sense of inadequacy, which is

central to the shame experience in a way that it is not central to the anger or fear experience (though it can certainly coexist with either). But Tarnopolsky herself does not do this. Rather, she leans in to the potentially problematic breadth of her definition, and, presumably in the interests of further highlighting what she sees as the significant pedagogical and civic value of respectful shaming, ends up enfolded into her understanding of shame other emotional experiences that one would think should properly be analyzed as distinct from it: at best, shame-adjacent experiences, we might say.

For example, one of Tarnopolsky's most unexpected moves occurs when she analyzes Socrates' refutation of Polus, the second interlocutor of the *Gorgias* sequence. Tarnopolsky is carefully observant of all three interlocutors, because she proposes that each man's reaction to undergoing Socratic refutation points to a different possible phenomenology of shaming. She is exploring the relationship of occurrent shame to our impulses about truth-speaking, and argues, successfully in my estimation, that shame neither always produces compulsive truth-speaking within the dialogue nor always produces compulsive truth-concealing. In *Gorgias* and Callicles, she says, the *Gorgias* has provided one example of each. Looking at Polus' encounter with Socrates, however, Tarnopolsky goes further. Since she is sure that Polus is shamed but sees Polus' characterization within the dialogue as that of a person experiencing bafflement, she concludes that shame may sometimes manifest simply as a state of bafflement, (thus prompting neither truth-revelation nor truth-concealment).

Treating the experience of bafflement as a species of shame-experience seems to ignore the existence of bafflement as an emotional and cognitive state in its own right.

Why conclude that shame can sometimes be an emotionally-neutral state of bafflement, when the possibility remains open that Socrates' elenctic interaction with Polus has produced bafflement *instead of* or *in addition to* shame? The move is especially peculiar if bafflement is not taken to be a kind of pain (which it might or might not be), because in that case it would not even fit under the umbrella of Tarnopolsky's original, broad definition.¹⁸

Rereading the Gorgias

Socrates as Shame-Dealer

In Tarnopolsky's view, we should trust that the *Gorgias* depicts Socrates shaming a series of interlocutors for two main reasons: First, as mentioned above, a connotation in the Greek allows the word *elenchus*, or refutation, sometimes to be read as "a shaming." Because Tarnopolsky ends by assuming that refutation *is* shaming, she works hard to show Socrates has refuted each of the main interlocutors of the *Gorgias*. If Socrates has refuted them, then he has shamed them. If he has shamed them, and if Plato thinks it's good that he's done so, then Plato advocates Socratic shaming. (Or, even better, Platonic shaming). But if, by contrast, refutation and shaming come apart, these examinations of refutation, while interesting and valuable in their own way, are neither conclusive nor strictly necessary to the overarching argument, because we can either agree or disagree that Socrates has refuted each of the *Gorgias* interlocutors without implying he has shamed them.

¹⁸ Christina H. Tarnopolsky, *Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants: Plato's Gorgias and the Politics of Shame* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010), 66-67.

As I have already suggested, I think Plato himself has loaded the *Gorgias* with a pattern of textual evidence that would discourage identifying *elenchus* with shaming. Socrates asks every interlocutor of the *Gorgias* at least once to do him the *favor* of refuting him, if they are able to catch him in any error at all. Socrates warmly encourages Gorgias to think like himself:

Now if you are the sort of person I am, I shall gladly continue the questions and answers; if not, I shall let them go. And what sort of person am I? One of those who are happy to be refuted if they make a false statement, happy also to refute anyone else who may do the same, yet not less happy to be refuted than to refute. For I think the former a greater benefit, in proportion as it is of greater benefit to be oneself delivered from the greatest harm than to deliver another. No worse harm, it is true, can befall a man than to hold wrong opinions on the matters now under discussion between us. If, then, you declare yourself to be such a person as I am, let us continue the discussion; but if you think we ought to let it go, let us at once dismiss it and close the interview (*Gorgias* 457-458).

If Gorgias is feeling at all reluctant or annoyed by the conversation to this point, Socrates has now put him in an awkward spot, to be sure. A collaborative spirit will be genuinely attracted to Socrates' vision of mutual benefit, while a competitive spirit will likely be reluctant to lose face by admitting he would rather just go unchallenged. Gorgias either genuinely likes the idea of persisting in the conversation, or he has worked out a reasonably clever way of trying to avoid it without admitting he's doing so. He worries aloud over the stamina of their audience, instead:

But I do indeed nominate myself, Socrates, to be just such a person as you describe. Perhaps, however, we ought to give some consideration to the others here with us. For quite some time, you know, even before you came in, I had been delivering a long address to the company here; and now, perhaps, if we continue our discussion, it may be somewhat protracted. We should, then, consider whether we are not detaining some of the others who may wish to attend to some other business (*Gorgias* 458).

The pressure Socrates exerts on Gorgias in this scene shows he understands how ego figures into elenctic exchanges, but the point remains that Socrates promises he will feel “happy” if Gorgias can only succeed in rescuing him from error. Not long afterward, Socrates similarly promises Polus that he will be “very much obliged” to Polus, or even to a child who is able to “kindly disprove me and rid me of my nonsense” (*Gorgias* 470). “Please do not grow weary in well-doing toward your friend!” he urges Polus. “Refute me!” Socrates requests refutation from Callicles no less than three times in rapid succession. The third time, he specifies that the action is “kind” and promises not to become angry with Callicles if Callicles succeeds. “I’ll not be annoyed with you as you have been with me; on the contrary, you’ll be nominated my greatest benefactor” (*Gorgias* 506).

Can the promise of these passages--refutation received with good feeling, even gratitude--be taken seriously? Is the Socrates who truly believes refutation is, first and foremost, mutual benefit and a kind of rescue, a possible creature? So long as it is *possible* to take this view seriously and sincerely to adopt it, then even if we were to conclude that the Socrates of the *Gorgias* is disingenuous and untrustworthy and only performing high good cheer as an *agonistic* tactic to make his interlocutor-opponent extra miserable, we should consider that refutation and shame can still come apart. Because the person who truly can receive refutation in the spirit of collaboration--and that person may, in fact, be the Socrates of the *Gorgias*--does not seem to be asking to be dealt shame, but rather to be dealt truth. On the contrary, the person would seem to be encouraging the view that shame need not enter in at all. If anything, one’s shame or cause for shame might sometimes be *removed* with the removal of the error.

The second reason Tarnopolsky trusts that Socrates shames the *Gorgias* interlocutors is that as each new focal interlocutor unseats the previous one, the successor *claims* his predecessor was shamed. Now, it is perfectly possible that this is the case. But I believe it would be much more accurate to say that Plato leaves carefully ambiguous the actual emotional state of each interlocutor at the time he is superseded by the next.

The upstart Polus interposes himself between his teacher Gorgias and Socrates, claiming that Socrates has shamed Gorgias into adopting a premise that Gorgias doesn't really affirm:

How's that, Socrates? Do you really believe yourself what you're saying about rhetoric? Or do you think because Gorgias was ashamed not to admit to you that a man versed in rhetoric didn't also know justice and beauty and goodness, and, if he came for instruction without this knowledge, that he would teach him himself--and then from this admission, a little inconsistency, perhaps, crept into the argument--that's a thing you love to do, turning the argument to questions like this--for who do you think would ever deny that Gorgias understands justice and can teach others? It's just downright rude to turn the argument to such questions! (401).

Certainly, from the point of Polus' interruption, Gorgias does fall silent and withdraw from the conversation (at least for a time), but Plato gives his audience no way of knowing how willingly Gorgias retreats, not even a remark on Gorgias' expressions or gestures. Polus simply asserts himself on the conversation with a sputtering intensity¹⁹,

¹⁹ If I read Polus' protest correctly, the objection (or small knot of objections) is not even an internally coherent one. At first, Polus seems angry that Socrates has manipulated Gorgias into affirming a premise Gorgias doesn't really believe. (Because the affirmation of that premise led to the inconsistency in Gorgias' ideas which Socrates has just pointed out, causing Gorgias to lose the argument--at least provisionally--and occasioning some presumed embarrassment). The premise in question seems to be Gorgias' agreement that he knows justice and would take responsibility for teaching justice to a student of rhetoric who didn't already know about it. If Gorgias abandons this claim to knowing justice and being able and willing to teach it, the inconsistency in the argument disappears. But Polus is just as angry that someone would ever doubt Gorgias

professes offense on Gorgias' behalf, and then eclipses Gorgias. Whatever Gorgias himself would have made of the *aporetic* impasse in the dialogue, is, thus, occluded.

In fact, as it happens, Gorgias will later speak up to say, whether ingenuously or disingenuously, that he would actually like to see the dialogue continue:

As far as I'm concerned, Socrates, I think you should not go yet. You must complete your argument and this, I believe, is the opinion of all the others, too. Personally, I have a strong wish to hear you continue the remaining portion by yourself (*Gorgias* 506).

Tarnopolsky chooses to interpret this statement from Gorgias as an indication that shame has had a positive effect on his outlook and at least partially converted him to philosophy. That is, Gorgias was respectfully and elenctically shamed by Socrates, replaced in the dialogue by Polus, had time to reconsider Socrates' viewpoint, experienced a moment of self-discovery on account of his having been shamed, and became genuinely attracted to the idea of seeing Socrates' ideas through to fruition. The best evidence in favor of this interpretation is that whereas previously Gorgias did volunteer to continue—as he has consistently volunteered to continue all throughout the dialogue, whenever anybody has actually asked him; Polus did not ask him--though he casually promised to comply with the audience if they wished otherwise, here, Gorgias' word choice is much less equivocal. "I have a strong wish," he says. Gorgias' stated "strong wish" *could* easily be genuine, and his earlier compliance *could* easily have been reluctant. Thus it is perfectly possible, albeit not at all guaranteed, that Gorgias' experience of refutation has converted him in some way to sincere interest in philosophy. The character Gorgias *may* have moved from unwillingness to participate further to

knows justice. If Gorgias does know justice, there should be no problem with his asserting as much in the first place. And if Gorgias does know justice and ought to affirm as much, then the flaw in Gorgias' argument must lie elsewhere, anyway.

sincere willingness to see the argument play out. Or he may have moved from unwillingness to participate to grudging willingness to see the argument play out, or from unwillingness to a face-saving pretense at willingness. Or he may *never have been shamed into silence at all*, but yielded the floor to his peremptory student Polus for unspecified reasons of his own. Perhaps because it would be good practice for Polus, who is a noticeably inferior moderator of his temper and therefore of his public image? Or perhaps because Polus is inexorable, and Gorgias would have had to make a scene in order to restrain him? Plato's characterization of Gorgias leaves every one of these options open.

Then, establishing a modest but notable pattern, Callicles likewise eclipses Polus, crying foul just as Polus did previously. Callicles rehashes Socrates' apparent offense against Gorgias, claiming that Socrates shamed Gorgias into compliance "with conventional morality," and adding a new objection on Polus' behalf, that Polus "conceded to you that doing wrong is uglier than suffering it, and it was from this concession that he got completely tangled up in the argument, and, being ashamed to say what he really thought, had his mouth gagged" (*Gorgias* 482). It is Callicles, not Polus himself, who reports that Socrates has shamed Polus into silence and non-participation, whereas one might just as easily say that Polus has had his mouth gagged by Callicles, who has imposed himself on the dialogue so noisily, with such vehemence, that once again, the previous focal interlocutor lapses into silence without indicating how willingly he goes.

It would be a mistake to ignore this curious and, I believe, very deliberate pattern of ambiguity in the characters' behavior as Plato has characterized it. Socrates himself

does not ignore the ambiguity but preserves it when he recalls their accusations out loud. Socrates says: “the point that *you thought* Polus conceded to me through shame,” and “a point which *Polus said* Gorgias had conceded through shame” (*Gorgias* 508).

Now, as I promised earlier, I have no evidence by which to dispute Polus’ claim that Socrates has shamed Gorgias or Callicles’ claim that Socrates has shamed both Gorgias and Polus. In fact, I think it’s perfectly plausible that Polus and Callicles have read their predecessors accurately, despite the fact that neither man shows any sign of being remarkably intuitive or empathetic. After all, if Gorgias and Polus really do feel so embarrassed at being reduced to *aporia* that they have been shamed into disingenuousness and silence, we can hardly expect them to report as much for themselves. To complain on their own behalf that Socrates has humiliated them would only add to whatever public humiliation they already feel. What we see in the sequence of interlocutors certainly *can* be read, with no express inconsistency, as a series of shaming incidents.

Yet were we in court, the accusations of Polus and Callicles would not be admissible for the truth of the matter asserted--namely, what Gorgias and Polus actually feel--but would be considered to speak more pointedly to the state of mind of the characters making the accusations. Denying the reader or auditor access to Gorgias and Polus’ internal (or even their self-reported) motivations for stepping aside and letting another auditor first speak for them and then upstage them teaches us less about the sense of shame that is operant in these specific individuals, and more about a climate of *agonistic* expectation in which the dialectical exchange, as a whole, is taking place. We can’t tell for certain whether Gorgias and Polus would agree that they have been shamed

by Socrates. We can't tell for certain whether Socrates set out to shame them. And we can't tell for certain whether Plato would approve, supposing that were Socrates' intent. But we can observe that when each interlocutor's friend or student cries foul on his behalf, it implies a civic context in which the complaints "you've shamed him into silence" or "you've shamed him into professing premises he doesn't really affirm" make sense and are readily understood. These objections are treated as intelligible and unsurprising. They seem to belong to the range of responses someone like Gorgias or Polus would be expected to have. Unless refutation is *essentially* shaming--and we should respect the boldness of the leap that would say it is--this pattern in the dramatic situation of the *Gorgias* points more directly to the existence of a civic narrative that guides the participants' experience of refutation, a civic narrative which includes the expectation that correction implies abasement or shame. Within this civic narrative, debate is not a cooperative assay at truth with the potential for shared benefit. The one who refutes is a victor, and the one who is refuted is, in some measure, disgraced and disrespected. This is what I call a climate of *agonistic* expectation.

The Ambiguous Gorgias

This observation, that the *Gorgias* may *not* actually tell a story in which a series of interlocutors are shamed into silence, but rather a story in which they *expect* each other to be shamed and act on those expectations, may seem a trifling one. But over time, the importance of this subtle ambiguity has dilated in my estimation until I now take it to be pointing out, quite deliberately I think, an overarching unity between the themes of the *Gorgias* and its characters and dramatic situation.

Consider that the stated topic of the *Gorgias* is rhetoric, its definition and its value. Rhetoric concerns persuasion and the use of language to negotiate civic life and relations between people. Insofar as we rely on the human ability to give and receive words and symbols, it is not possible for us to remove ambiguity from personal relations and civic life. We know that for a variety of reasons, only some of which have anything to do with the conscious choice to deceive, words and symbols do not always communicate the truth, or even what we intend. Unless we can find a way to give up personal relations and civic life, we remain sunk in this ambiguity.

Plato's characterization of Gorgias, the most expert rhetorician among the dialogue's interlocutors, should function to remind us about this inescapable state of rhetorical uncertainty. Gorgias is a well-realized but highly ambiguous character. He is by no means non-descript or a cipher, but his well-realized characterization is, nonetheless, insufficient to tell Plato's reader *who he really is*. Here is a rhetorician who unwittingly volunteered himself to become a Socratic interlocutor when he promised that his expertise in rhetoric sufficiently prepares him to give an answer to any question posed by anyone: this is the kind of temptation Socrates could not possibly be expected to resist. After all, either Gorgias is importantly in error about the value of what he is propagating by teaching to others, (in which case Socrates would be doing Gorgias a disservice by allowing him to continue making such a serious error), or Gorgias will give a helpful answer to Socrates' question, thereby alleviating some of Socrates' own ignorance. The questioning will be at least ostensibly voluntary--eager, even--on both sides, and at least one of these characters will have the privilege of becoming an epistemic benefactor to the other. What could possibly go wrong?

Although a professional rhetorician who boasts that he has an answer to every question, Gorgias proves woefully underprepared to answer a question about the merits of his own discipline, and he has much to lose if Socrates is too successful at publicly undermining his claims to expertise. Gorgias fails, attempt after attempt, to provide Socrates with satisfying answers, and doesn't seem to grasp what characteristics a satisfactory definition of rhetoric would have. And yet Gorgias is memorable for remaining one of Socrates' most distinctly civil opponents, despite such a poor show at matching Socrates' wits. Right up until the moment Polus interjects himself into the conversation on Gorgias' behalf, Gorgias has remained perfectly capable of maintaining a pleasant demeanor toward Socrates.

Gorgias is a cooperative character, his even keel made even more noticeable because the dialogue places him alongside Polus' over-eagerness and Callicles' open hostility. When asked, as I mentioned above, Gorgias always states that he is willing to continue the discussion. But Gorgias is, after all, a *professional rhetorician*. His work is to operate before an audience, to please and to appease them. Socrates will use the word "flattery" to describe what he proposes it is that the Gorgianic rhetorician really "knows" how to do.

Just because Gorgias' claim to have a ready answer on any subject takes a serious public blow during his run-in with Socrates, it does not follow that Gorgias carries off no demonstration whatever of something qualifying as professional skill. If Gorgias is the teacher, Polus the student, and Callicles the aficionado, then Gorgias exceeds his fellow interlocutors not in argumentative prowess but significantly in image management. Gorgias may understand, as few of Socrates' interlocutors seem to do, that willing

cooperation with Socrates is the best way to appear unthreatened by him and maintain the goodwill of the listening audience. In short, Gorgias may be a fairly nice man with genuine curiosity to his credit, or he may be very skilled at appearing to be a fairly nice man with genuine curiosity to his credit. And it is entirely appropriate that a dialogue asking whether rhetoric can be trusted to bring justice rather than merely pleasure and false confidence to the city, should present a character whose pleasant but utterly ambiguous demeanor and uncertain-but-possible “conversion” to philosophy demand we ask such questions about trust. This is a fruitful ambiguity. Gorgias can function at once to demonstrate how an interlocutor--even one whose poor dialectical comprehension crossed with his public importance makes him particularly vulnerable--can cooperate with Socrates and undergo refutation receptively, *but* also as a reminder that Plato’s dialogues duplicate the rhetorical ambiguities which are an unavoidable part of encountering others and deciding whether they (and their views) deserve our trust.

Arts, Knacks, and the Physician: Gorgias’ Moment of Truth

If there is a single moment of the dialogue that provides a crucial clue as to Gorgias’ true colors, I believe we will get no closer than the moment when Gorgias has his closest brush with success, the moment when Gorgias almost has within his grasp an example of rhetoric’s true civic importance.

A centerpiece of the *Gorgias* is, of course, the discussion of arts and knacks. Socrates proposes a model that would locate all true arts within just four categories. With Gorgias’ agreement, Socrates posits that human beings are composed of bodies and souls. A true art, as Socrates defines it, should be a discipline that benefits humans through systematic and reliable application of some kind of secure knowledge. If arts benefit

humans and humans are made up of body and soul, then the true arts can be divided into two classes according to the part of the human person they benefit. From there, Socrates further subdivides the two types of arts according to whether they raise up strong and excellent human specimens from the outset, or deliver a corrective when something has gone wrong. Thus, Gymnastics subsumes all arts that build strength and prescribe nourishment for the body, while Medicine describes any arts that make the body well again, should it become weak and sick. In parallel, Legislation captures all arts that cultivate and guide human souls to be good, whereas Justice provides a corrective to souls that go astray. For each of these four true arts, Socrates also names a false imitator, or a “knack.” A “knack” gives pleasure without concern for benefiting the body or the soul, and does so unreflectively, without being able to give an account of itself. A “knack” is a propensity for being pleasing, but it is not a discipline. Socrates considers knacks a type of flattery.

If Gymnastics and Medicine are true arts that benefit the body, then Pastry and Makeup make a pretense at benefiting the body by presenting a facsimile of nourishment or health while delivering only pleasure. Meanwhile, if Legislation and Justice are the true arts that benefit the soul, Sophistry and Rhetoric are *their* posited imitators. Thus, Rhetoric (at least as Gorgias has fumblingly defined it) makes a pretense at providing a corrective for the soul, without authentically benefiting it. Philosophy serves and orders the two true arts in service of the soul by working to ascertain *how* souls can be made good and what is just. Implicitly, philosophy also presides over the good for the body, by reflecting on what bodily habits and virtues best serve the good of the soul.

Throughout the *Gorgias*, both Socrates and Gorgias have nominally agreed that a physician is a positive example of a knowledgeable person who truly benefits others through practicing his art. Because the physician provides a medical corrective when a body declines into ill-health, the physician is the body's analog to the soul's justice-dealer. Meanwhile, the rhetorician is posited as the practitioner of a false art which pretends to correct and guide souls but gives advice without a basis in knowledge. According to Socrates' scheme (and the hints that scheme implies) the rhetorician would have to *become* a justice-dealer in order to be counted a true artisan. Because the physician is paralleled with the justice dealer, the reformed rhetorician's strategy for becoming a justice-dealer might include imitatively looking to her better-known analog, the physician.

So we arrive at a moment in the discussion when Socrates has been pressing Gorgias to explain what rhetoric knows that overlaps with no other discipline. Socrates strongly implies that rhetoric qualifies as a true art only if it teaches something no other discipline can, but Gorgias struggles to meet Socrates' expectation. It does seem as though he's simply never thought it through before.

The rhetor usually takes as his subject a topic that is really some other discipline's area of expertise. Why, then, should the *polis* care to hear from the rhetor when it could listen to the expert, the artisan, instead? Finally, a promising line presents itself, and Gorgias snatches at it: Socrates and Gorgias arrive again at the example of the physician. The physician is knowledgeable about diagnosis and treatment, where the rhetor is not, but patients are often reluctant to do as the physician instructs, and physicians aren't

always persuasive. Many times, in accordance with his diagnostic expertise, the physician prescribes something painful or unpleasant (“cautery”).

This moment, I believe, is the moment that Gorgias might have demonstrated--very simply, in fact--that rhetoric really *can* be serviceable and “noble,” just as Gorgias has been saying all along. All Gorgias has to do is tell Socrates that the rhetorician knows more about persuasion itself than the physician does and can therefore work alongside the physician, put herself in service of the physician, to enhance the physician’s likelihood of treating the patient and disseminating knowledge. The patient’s reluctance to accept a painful treatment can possibly be overcome if the rhetor and the physician work together.

What Gorgias says *instead* indicates either how uncritically he thinks or that he truly does take secret pride in rhetoric’s mere power over people rather than in its potential to do good. Gorgias volunteers that if he were put *in competition* with the physician, he would succeed in winning the crowd over every time, despite the fact that his speaking would lack the physician’s basis in knowledge.

Gorgias seems relieved finally to have been able to secure a victory for rhetoric. He has explained what rhetoric does best! But according to Gorgias’ choice of account, what rhetoric does best is upstaging knowledge, perhaps even *overcoming* it in the battle for public affection. Though Gorgias thinks this is the moment he has finally won, it seems far more likely this missed opportunity triggers Socrates’ declaration that *based on what Gorgias himself has said*, rhetoric doesn’t seem to be an art, at all.

Whether from thoughtlessness or from venality, Gorgias makes a choice to define rhetoric in accordance with the climate of *agonistic* expectation. This choice, then, is juxtaposed with Socrates’ frequent insistence that refutation can be welcomed as

mutually beneficial and a source of gladness--an alternative, collaborative understanding under which refutation can take place without shame. Rhetoric can become Justice when, in theory, it is put in the service of knowledge.

Problems of Ambiguity and Justice-Dealing

On the other hand, had Gorgias done as I suggest, he would still by no means have anticipated and addressed all the problematizing questions about rhetoric and justice-dealing that still persist within the dialogue. The rhetor acting in service of the physician is one positive example that shows how at least some uses of persuasion can be art rather than flattery. Yet the usefulness of even this single example is predicated on the claim Socrates and the interlocutors have generally affirmed, that physicians possess true knowledge of their art and can apply it reliably. Without a truly knowledgeable and reliable (i.e., *wise*) individual to serve, how is a rhetorician to become a dealer of justice? And how are souls to be corrected?

It is not obvious whether Socrates truly takes for granted that the physician's studies have given him a kind of complete knowledge within his own sphere of practice, or whether he allows this conventional perspective in order to see whether it teases out from the others any admissions of doubt. Either way, whether we are meant to accept the physician as a clear example of secure knowledge or worry that even the physician may not be, the physician functions only analogously to the practitioner of justice. What the people of the *polis* require is someone who can diagnose the ill-health of souls and then use language to teach and prescribe a corrective course of action. But where is a true diagnostician of souls to be found? The dialogue has turned out to be more optimistic than it may at first appear regarding the potential value and nobility of rhetoric itself:

despite the fact that Gorgias fails to define rhetoric in a way that would reveal its value and nobility, Socrates himself points ahead to what would make for a superior definition, even as he finds fault with that of Gorgias. On the other hand, the dialogue is simultaneously pessimistic about locating a genuinely wise person to whom the rhetor, with his special training in the methods of communication and persuasion, can actually ally himself.

Though Socrates seems confident about the physician, he has no similar confidence when it comes to locating an analogous practitioner of justice. Socrates knows that he himself is cautious and well-intentioned, and yet he doesn't trust himself to become a statesman, because a true statesman would need to be a diagnostician and legislator for souls, just as the physician is a diagnostician of the body. Socrates claims not to know souls or precisely what is good for them well enough to prescribe on their behalf. If Socrates cannot be the true diagnostician for souls but wants to contribute to their improvement through philosophy and rhetoric, then in the interests of justice, he likely requires a rhetoric that can communicate truthfully but more provisionally--an open-ended and malleable rhetoric, rather than a cauterizing, diagnostic rhetoric.

Tarnopolsky makes an interesting but underrealized claim about Socratic irony. She believes the Athenian democratic virtue of candor is so important to both Plato and Socrates that Socratic irony can actually be classed as a type of candid speech. This is a provocative but certainly nonobvious view. Where Socratic irony is simply cutting speech (sarcasm, perhaps contempt), it could fit Tarnopolsky's idea of Socratic candor with little further explanation. But when Socratic irony involves, for example, probably-false modesty and/or a pretense-to-ignorance which very likely exaggerate or distort what

Socrates really thinks, it is not at all obvious how Socrates' choice to express himself in understatement and/or hyperbole can be more candid than, say, a precise and accurately rendered report.

I believe that Plato's Socrates radically loves the truth. Therefore, if Socrates both loves truth and employs irony, it seems as though he must (a) consider irony a bad habit insofar as it misleads, or (b) think its sometime untruthfulness is justifiable in light of some end (such as causing others to become attracted to the life of philosophy), or (c) have some notion how irony *can* be a kind of truth-speaking.

I would like to suggest a possible way of understanding the relationship between *parrhesia* and at least *some* examples of Socratic rhetoric. Specifically, I suggest that Socrates at least sometimes employs a style of irony I call "provisional," which allows him to communicate firmly and truthfully about his values while applying some manner of judgment or diagnostic in a more open-ended and provisional way.²⁰ In some cases, I

²⁰ In *The Art of Living*, Alexander Nehamas makes a historical survey of attempts to come to grips with Socratic and pre-Socratic irony. Nehamas' goal seems to be to find a single guiding approach to Socratic ironies that would describe them all equally well. He rejects views such as that of Vlastos, which posits that irony is, in fact, truth-speaking when it states the opposite of what is intended, but the auditor knows the opposite, specifically, was intended. This view is too simplistic, Nehamas argues, because it may describe some, more-straightforward instances of irony, but not all instances. At times, it is not clear that Socrates means the opposite. At times, it is not clear *what* Socrates means, exactly. Vlastos settles on the governing view that irony is superiority, though it also renders its user vulnerable, by virtue of its inherent assertion of superiority. Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 48-63.

By contrast, I have no governing view of all Socratic ironies at once. What I am suggesting is something more along the lines of *mimetic* irony in Mitchell Miller. *Mimetic* irony is a particular species of the overarching type. Miller suggests that Socrates engages in *mimesis* when he plays the role of his interlocutor, *to* the interlocutor, putting him on stage before himself, then acting out a way to escape whatever condition is being dramatized.

believe Socrates' provisional irony operates as a "second-best" substitute for the rhetoric of a justice-dealer and true diagnostician of souls, in that it can *become* an indictment of the injustice of the soul, "if the shoe fits," so to speak.

When Socrates expresses expectation and optimism that he is likely to be taught or refuted by an interlocutor who does not seem particularly promising on the face of it, this could be an instance of provisional irony. If Socrates' intent is neither to communicate the *unlikelihood* that he will be taught (which is a more biting and less provisional position), nor to presume the actual likelihood that he will be taught (which is simply unlikely), he might instead hope to convey a firm conviction in certain values--such as the good of being taught something truthful, no matter by whom, or the good of charity and open-mindedness toward the conversation partner--paired with an implication of open-endedness about the immediate situation. Socrates does not really know whether he will be taught or who can teach him, so he crafts a response that communicates true belief about values through a playful, provisionally-intended statement that conveys his values much more firmly than it does his confidence about how they apply in the present moment.

Miller's examples of *mimetic* irony include times when the characters don't seem to know each other ahead of time, so he might not agree with what I will here suggest. But there is a perspective from which provisional irony might be a kind of natural complement to *mimetic* irony.

Mimetic irony functions more diagnostically. To work, it requires, to some extent at least, that one know the soul of the person one performs. This will be more likely among friends--like Socrates and Phaedrus, in the *Phaedrus*, for example, which is rife with *mimesis*--than among less familiar persons--like Socrates and Callicles in the *Gorgias*. If *mimetic* irony is an irony for the souls one knows, provisional irony could be a contrasting type for souls one *does not* know. See: Mitchell H. Miller, *Plato's Parmenides: The Conversion of the Soul* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991).

A particularly fine example of provisional irony, this time with a hidden, perhaps provisionally justice-dealing barb, can be found within the *Gorgias* itself, when Socrates “compliments” Callicles on his more-than-likely hostile invective. Socrates tells Callicles, “It is my belief that a man who is going to test a soul on the correctness (or the reverse) of its life must have three qualities: knowledge, good will, and candor. You have them all” (*Gorgias* 487). This “compliment” strongly affirms truth about the character of the individual who can best benefit others; Socrates surely does honor the combination of knowledge, good will, and candor. And by praising Callicles for possessing these qualities, Socrates truthfully testifies to their value; he communicates that the man who deserves to be complimented would be the man who fits this description. Of course, Callicles doesn’t *seem* especially knowledgeable or goodwilled at all. But if Socrates is not a true diagnostician of souls, he may wish to come short of dealing any actual injustice to another person whose soul he does not know--even a person as suspect as Callicles. Suppose, then, that he resorts to a kind of provisionally-intended charity--a compliment, which will actually function as an indictment if Callicles measures himself against it and finds himself wanting. Though Socrates cannot know Callicles’ soul, Callicles can. The affirmation of value within Socrates’ provisional irony provides a possible, provisional alternative to diagnostic justice-dealing by confronting Callicles with an affirmation of goodness against which he can sharpen himself. Provisional irony almost certainly has the potential to deal shame, but it is not advocacy of shame or an act of shaming. It is a peculiar way of expressing love for the truth.

Chapter Conclusion: Value of Parrhesia with Caution About Shaming

The possibility of our truthful speech shaming someone who may or may not deserve to be shamed should not--in itself--be considered a reason for us to repress or revise truthful speech. The pedagogical problem that we witness in the *Symposium*, whereby the shame of Socrates' friends has apparently overtaken their willingness to practice philosophy creatively and collaboratively, calls for some kind of a therapeutic and up-building response to misplaced or debilitating shame. But it does not call for the silencing of truthful speech or incisive questioning. It is the very self-silencing of Aristodemus that betrays his counter-productive and poor self-estimation. To adopt the *simple* response of silencing frank speech and shared inquiry for Aristodemus' sake would only be to reinforce the lie at the root of his shame.

However, the *Symposium*, in keeping, I think, with general opinion, strongly suggests that shame, whether deserved or undeserved, rational or irrational, proportionate or disproportionate to its circumstances, is certainly *not* always salutary, and that, moreover, it can occur where no shaming was ever intended. In the absence of a true diagnostician of souls, the respectful shame-dealer simply does not have such perfect control over the emotions of others that he can wield shame with the physician's scalpel-like precision. In the chapter that follows, I pursue alternate approaches to examining shame in Plato and to describing Socratic pedagogy.

CHAPTER THREE

Better Together: Shame, Love, and Rhetoric

Does Plato Advocate Shaming?

Trying to establish that Socrates never intentionally shames an interlocutor would be an uphill battle at best, and one I consider it neither wise nor necessary to wage. Platonic dialogues include at least some examples of times where the character Socrates seems to intend that, given the specific circumstances of the dramatic action, shame would be an appropriate response for himself or for someone else to feel. In the *Phaedrus*, for example, Socrates acts regretful and abashed after giving (presumably as a kind of rhetorical exercise) a speech that denigrates Love. Socrates would like to disown this speech, because “it was foolish, and close to being impious. What could be more horrible than that?” (*Phaedrus* 242d). Socrates seems to imply that shame, especially before the gods and before Phaedrus, his friend, interlocutor, and witness, would be a fitting emotional response to his impiety and failure of personal integrity.

The *Apology* provides an example of a time Socrates implies shame would be an appropriate emotion for someone else to feel. Beginning his defense against the charges brought by his fellow Athenians, Socrates expresses surprise that his accusers do not feel ashamed of themselves for exaggerating Socrates’ eloquence (presumably intending that Socrates is someone who strays from plain speech into facile manipulation) and for bringing trumped up charges, charges that Socrates promises he will easily refute (*Apology* 17b). In this example, Socrates says that shame *should* be expected to follow on an imminent refutation, but from the context of the speech, we have good reason to think

that Socrates locates his accusers' offense not in their being wrong and requiring correction, but in the self-evident internal incoherence and dishonesty of their position. The ease with which Socrates promises they will be refuted is mentioned not to speak to Socrates' elenctic or rhetorical skill, but rather to the shoddiness and blatant untruthfulness of the opposing case. Socrates believes his accusers' error is not obscure but obvious, and the circumstantial stakes happen to be high: If the jury does not concede the internal incoherence of their accusations, a man (and, Socrates says, a gift to the city from the god himself) will likely be executed. Thus, it would be fitting for Socrates' accusers to feel ashamed of themselves, because they should be well aware of the irresponsibility of their position. The accusers' failure to admit as much and to recant speaks to their disinterest in the truth. Not to love the truth or to take care with it is, for Socrates, a good reason to feel ashamed.

If Socrates is right that there are at least some circumstances, perhaps especially having to do with impiety or the abdication of a personal duty (to the city, to the self, to others, to the truth), when it's fitting to feel ashamed, why should we hesitate to assert that Plato's Socrates advocates shaming? As I see it, the kinds of reasons that remain as to why we should still doubt this position go something like this: (1) To advocate a course of action is both to endorse its acceptability and to project its efficacy. So if Socrates advocates shaming, that would imply that not only does he sometimes consider it to be a justifiable course of action, but he also thinks shaming itself likely to do some good. (2) We will often¹ need a true diagnostician of souls in order to figure out who

¹ Socrates himself seems to prefer not to take for granted that he is a true diagnostician of souls. I have argued, for example, that he may employ some ironic speech as a method of giving his interlocutors the benefit of the doubt--dealing justice

deserves to be shamed, and a true diagnostician of souls is not easy to come by. (3) Even if we know that someone deserves to feel shame, it's not obvious that just anyone is the right person to induce it, or that just any circumstance is the right circumstance for the shame to be dealt. And (4), it seems overly-optimistic to imagine we exercise such precise rhetorical power over the emotions of others, in the first place. If what we mean by "shaming" is only "telling difficult, perhaps unwelcome, but salutary truths--truths which *might* occasion shame" then the practice seems laudable, defensible and prescribable--but neither guaranteed to produce shame nor laudable specifically on account of its producing shame, if indeed it does. On the other hand, if what we mean by "shaming" is, quite specifically "acting in ways that induce shame²," then we make sense of the exact choice of terms, but we must still wonder why we would think we have the power and precision to bring about this exact result.

If Socrates can actually live up to the his characterization in the *Gorgias*, for example, and receive refutation *gladly*, as a gift from one friend to another, why should we prefer and privilege shame as an emotional response to difficult but salutary truths, when we have little specific reason to think shame exceeds other emotions, such as gratitude, when it comes to inspiring sincere change? Truth-telling and receptivity to the

(perhaps) without having to know the state of his interlocutor's soul. But in the case of the *Apology*, the accusers' failure to love the truth is made manifest by their actions--i.e., Socrates thinks they have made a mistake a conscientious person would not make. So Socrates can openly imply that his accusers ought to be ashamed of themselves without having to know more about the state of their souls.

² We could also opt to define shaming as "acting with *the intent* to produce shame." Under this definition, we can more easily succeed at performing the action. All we have to do is form the intention and act. But this alternate definition does not really help. It is still not clear why intending to produce shame should be advocated or preferred over intending to tell the truth (while remaining open to and aware of the possibility of emotional consequences).

truth--*parrhesia* itself, rather than the potential pain of its “cautery”--seem to be the elements here that are truly foundational to justice in the *polis*.

Thus, while we would not have an easy time proving that Socrates and/or Plato *decry* shaming (because so long as shame can be deserved, it stands to reason that justice can defensibly deal it, at least under the right kinds of circumstances), we would also, I believe, have an equally tough time proving that Socrates and/or Plato *advocate* shaming.

By way of anticipating objections, this conclusion might seem implausible to readers familiar with Plato’s *Protagoras*. The *Protagoras* is a dialogue that invites comparison with the *Gorgias* by (1) telling a very similar kind of story, and (2) enacting an inquiry into the topics of legislation and sophistry, which together form the second pairing of true art and mere knack to round out the model of arts and knacks that Socrates presented in the *Gorgias*. The Socrates of the *Gorgias* proposed a classification of true arts and false arts (“knacks”), according to which sophistry and legislation, rhetoric and justice are distinguished but also paralleled. Sophistry and legislation have in common that they purport to instruct souls and thereby make them virtuous. But according to Socrates, sophistry is actually an uninformed false art that doesn’t actually know how to produce virtue and yet pleases by only seeming to do so. Legislation, by contrast, names the informed practice of creating laws that would make citizens of the *polis* good. The Socrates of the *Gorgias* certainly doesn’t take for granted that *actual* legislators always make the citizens good. But insofar as individual legislators do not know how to instill virtue in the citizens, they are simply not practicing the true art of legislation. The arts of the *Gorgias* model are conditional; a person is only practicing them when he or she is

doing so wisely and conscientiously. (Thus, there may simply be remarkably few true *artists*).

Of course, although the Socrates of the *Gorgias* proposed a model that included sophistry and legislation, the *Gorgias* itself did not go on extensively to investigate this pair of practices. Instead, the *Gorgias* discussion focused on rhetoric and justice, where “justice” is the art of true corrective for souls, and “rhetoric,” it is posited, names the “knack” that makes no more than a pretense at correcting souls, (whether because it doesn’t know how or because it flatters outright-disingenuously, etc.)³ So the *Protagoras* can be read as picking up where the *Gorgias* left off. Though the *Protagoras* does not explicitly invoke the *Gorgias*’ scheme of classification, it implicitly takes up the investigation of an important paired art and knack on which the *Gorgias* remained mostly silent, and it does so within a dramatic situation that happens to resemble that of the *Gorgias* in a few respects:

In the *Protagoras*⁴, Socrates accompanies a young friend (Hippocrates) who is eager to hear a visiting expert (the eponymous Protagoras), just as the Socrates of the

³ I believe it is always important to remember that this indictment of rhetoric is as conditional as Socrates’ praise for legislation was also. Just as someone is a legislator only when he or she is knowledgeably writing laws that teach souls to be virtuous, someone is a mere rhetorician (rather than a true practitioner of justice) when he or she is using persuasion to flatter disingenuously and/or to give ill-founded advice. I believe the Socrates of the *Gorgias* actually tries to warn Gorgias that this criticism of rhetoric comes as a direct consequence of Gorgias’ failure to explain his “art” to Socrates in a way that would show how rhetoric can be put in service of justice and truth. We don’t know that Socrates thinks rhetoric (here meaning, more generally: study of methods for persuasion) must always be opposed to justice, only that Gorgias (and Polus) haven’t shown how persuasion and justice can work together.

⁴ Throughout the dissertation, I will appeal to: Plato, *Protagoras*, trans. Stanley Lombardo and Karen Bell, in *Plato. Complete Works*, ed. J. Cooper, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 746-790.

Gorgias accompanied his friend Chaerophon to see the visiting expert Gorgias.

Protagoras is a sophist, professing knowledge of virtue and argumentation, whereas Gorgias was, of course, a rhetorician. In each case, after hearing enthusiastic testimonials from his friend, Socrates tests the mettle of the visiting expert in front of an audience. Since both Protagoras and Gorgias depend for their livelihoods on their fame and reputation, the civic stakes are high in both cases.

However, there are also notable differences between the two dialogues. Whereas I prefer to read the Socrates of the *Gorgias* as an opportunity creator--one who actually drops hints about how Gorgias might *succeed* at making his case (hints on which Gorgias, whether due to his poor aptitude for dialectic or to personal blind spots indicative of concealed venality, unfortunately does not capitalize)--the Socrates of the *Protagoras* does not show Protagoras any such leniency. Arguably, the Socrates of the *Protagoras* betrays an intention to demolish Protagoras and his public reputation from the moment the two engage one another. In fact, I read the Socrates of the *Protagoras* as deliberately luring Protagoras into the trap of a public contest. Socrates uses open, charming and friendly language toward Protagoras until the moment that Protagoras has agreed their conversation will be a public one and the audience has gathered 'round. Then, from that moment on, Socrates' tone changes dramatically.

Perhaps Socrates is much harder on Protagoras simply because Protagoras is a more competent interlocutor than Gorgias was. Perhaps the more dialectical facility Protagoras exhibits, the more culpable Socrates considers him for putting his intellect in the service of mere sophistry. Whatever the case, I am not aware of any other dialogue where I would say that Socrates shows so little interest in the state of his interlocutor's

soul. Even Socrates' threat to abandon the conversation--the very opposite of what he usually cares most to do--suggests that Socrates thinks neither he nor Protagoras can truly be improved by their continued interaction.

But as I interpret it, this dialectical exchange is not *for* Protagoras. It is for Socrates' friend, Hippocrates, and for the audience: an intervention on behalf of *their* souls by means of an attempt at ending Protagoras' career. Therefore, I think it can make sense to say that Socrates has the express goal of *publicly humiliating*, or alternately, *publicly degrading* Protagoras. And if Socrates, in even this one instance, models "publicly humiliating," why not concede that he advocates shaming (and that Plato advocates shaming also, supposing we interpret Plato as approving Socrates' attack on Protagoras)?⁵

⁵ As to whether Plato *does* approve of Socrates attempting to publicly humiliate Protagoras, I prefer to think that the answer is neither 'yes' nor 'no,' specifically. I think one of Plato's purposes for that dialogue is to dramatize a particularly brutal incident of attempted justice-dealing by a 'justice-dealer' (Socrates) who is presumably acting from a place of conviction. As I argued in the previous chapter, the *Gorgias* implicitly problematizes justice-dealing, even as it affirms the importance of souls receiving just correction. (And encourages us, at least, to consider that undergoing unjust punishment is not as bad as dealing unjust punishment). When our souls are unhealthy, we need justice-punishment, even--to put us right. But the role of the justice-dealer should be filled by a *knowledgeable* person, someone analogous to a physician. Socrates respects statesmanship but doubts that he has ever encountered a competent and knowledgeable statesman. He explains that he himself declines to enter public service until he can be confident he knows how to serve the souls of the public. Thus, one of Plato's questions about justice-dealing is likely to be: *who* can deal justice and when? When Socrates asks in the *Apology* whether his accusers are, in fact, *shameless*, we can see that in this instance, Socrates considers himself sufficiently knowledgeable about the accusers' injustice, because he has observed them do something he thinks *no one* would do in good conscience. Thus, *if* Socrates is justified in publicly humiliating Protagoras, it is likely because Protagoras' conduct has been analogous to that of the accusers in the *Apology*: i.e., Protagoras has done something that could *not* be an honest mistake. But despite Plato allowing the reader of the *Protagoras* access to Socrates' inner monologue (it is a dialogue narrated by Socrates in the first person), Plato conspicuously declines to use this opportunity to show the audience how Socrates decided what sort of treatment Protagoras'

Even here, however, I am not convinced that shaming--either in the sense of acting with the intention to cause shame or of acting in a way that makes causing shame incidental but probable--has taken place. When I say that Socrates intends a public humiliation, I mean that Socrates wants to abase Protagoras in front of his fans; Socrates wants to *disarm* him, to take away his power and influence. Socrates wants Protagoras to lose face. But to suggest that Socrates intends for Protagoras to be shamed (or to feel any particular emotion) is actually generous, I think, with regard to the level of concern Socrates evinces for Protagoras as a person. Socrates treats Protagoras as somehow determinedly beyond the pale. About what Protagoras *feels* I do not think Socrates cares one whit.⁶

soul deserves. We the audience are left missing one or more important pieces of information that we would need in order to judge Socrates' bold conduct. Thus, in my view, Plato demonstrates neither conclusive approval nor conclusive disapproval of Socrates, as such, but points to the boldness and seriousness of what Socrates is doing, as well as to questions about what we would have to ascertain in order to be justified in evaluating or emulating it.

⁶ Because Socrates narrates the *Protagoras* in the first person, readers can tell that Socrates is making observations about how Protagoras feels. To this extent, Protagoras's feelings are of interest to Socrates. There is an interesting moment in the dialogue when Socrates observes that he can tell Protagoras is nervous and vulnerable, for example. But what is at least as interesting as Socrates taking note of Protagoras feelings (or what Socrates reports he *thinks* Protagoras is feeling, anyway), is that Socrates easily could but definitely does not go on to say anything about why Protagoras' feelings are relevant to him. Socrates doesn't give any indication how his taking note of Protagoras' emotional state influences what Socrates chooses to do next. Yet not long afterward, Socrates comes at Protagoras very aggressively--living up to Protagoras' anxious expectations, perhaps. That Plato shows Socrates taking note of Protagoras' emotional state, but then declines to report how this insight guides what Socrates decides to *do*, is another example, I believe, of the fecund ambiguity of the dialogue form.

Eros, Shame, and Rhetoric are Better Together

For these reasons, I believe that shame's significance in Plato's writings will actually be better-understood if we abandon the question, "Does Plato advocate shaming (or even 'some specific type of shaming')?"⁷ and adopt instead a new focus. In the remainder of this chapter, I propose an alternate approach.

Specifically, I argue that the significance of shame in Plato is better-explored when shame is considered alongside and in relation to love and rhetoric, rather than on its own. One simple reason for thinking so is that these themes can already be seen intertwining in at least three Platonic dialogues: the *Symposium*, the *Gorgias*, and the *Phaedrus*. In this chapter, I will try to get at what each of the three dialogues uniquely contributes regarding the interrelationships between these three concepts. Then, I will revisit the desideratum of a prescriptive account of Socratic pedagogy that would speak to shame's place in teaching and learning. I will argue that, ultimately, the best prescriptive accounts of emotion's place in Socratic rhetoric and pedagogy are going to be those that in some way anticipate the interrelations between shame and love, and I will point out what I take to be one example of a positive prescriptive account of Socratic pedagogy that fits this description.

There's actually nothing very surprising about the idea that shame, love, and rhetoric should appear alongside one another within a single dramatic situation. If shame

⁷ The *Apology* example includes Socrates interrogating his accusers' sense of shame. He asks them *if they are not ashamed* at what they've brought about. This question *could* certainly be an attempt to induce deserved shame, but its more pointed aim seems to be to call the accusers to examine themselves. Here again, we are on much solidier ground as regards the claim that Socrates and Plato call for conscientious self-examination in the face of difficult truths than as regards the claim that they advocate shaming.

is an emotion that often occurs in response to our negotiation of the boundaries between our own identities and those of others, and if language--or symbols--are often the *tools* by which we negotiate these social boundaries, then our individual identities will be defined at least partly by internalized persuasion. The occurrent experience of shame may not always involve rhetoric, but *shaming* is a kind of persuasion. It makes good sense that shame and rhetoric would be connected.

Language is also a tool of image-management, as I believe we see highlighted in Plato's characterization of the groomed and image-conscious character Gorgias. Whether language is employed most scrupulously, rather ingenuously, with the intent to deceive (or in any possible mixture of the above), language is one means by which we throw up an image of the self for the benefit of the imagined, internalized or actual other's appraising gaze. Self-disclosure through language or symbols is rhetorical, as is self-concealment through language or symbols. Plato explores this characteristic of social interactions and dialectical exchanges through his use of the dialogue form, which generally restricts access to characters' interior states (except in rare instances involving first-person narrators, and even then we are unable wholly to divest ourselves of questions about how accurately these narrators are either able or willing to report themselves), in favor of focus on what his characters choose to say--or sometimes not to say--for themselves.

It also makes good sense that shame and love would be intimately connected. If shame can reveal internalized values, and love ascribes and is drawn toward perceived value, then the allegiances dictated by what we love will have everything to do with when and whether we feel shame.

Finally, as I will argue, it also makes sense to think that rhetoric and love are intimately connected. I want to make my case, with the *Phaedrus* as my primary basis, that Plato would like rhetoric to be understood as an *erotic* social mechanism with the power to lead souls and cultivate love for the good. If love has a powerful influence on the circumstances under which we do or do not feel ashamed (and perhaps especially on whether misplaced shame obstructs our participation in worthy experiences and endeavors), and if rhetoric functions to cultivate love, then rather than asking whether Plato recommends the use of persuasion to induce justly-deserved shame, we might do better to ask how Plato recommends the use of persuasion to promote *falling in love with the good*. If we bend our efforts toward leading souls to love good things, then the *erotic* power of love itself will both levy deserved shame (when we become conscious that we have failed adequately to live up to our own internalized values) and protect souls against misplaced shame (because *eros* is a propulsive desire to draw near to the good, and when we are *erotically* propelled by it, we don't easily turn aside for lesser loves). In what follows, I attempt to demonstrate that this view of *eros*, shame, and rhetoric can be synthesized from examining the ways these three themes interact in the *Symposium*, the *Gorgias*, and the *Phaedrus*.

The Symposium, Gorgias, and Phaedrus are Better Together

The Symposium

Eros, shame, and rhetoric each play a significant role in Plato's *Symposium*.⁸ *Eros* is particularly visible, since the whole dialogue revolves around competing views of Love and the benefits that Love brings to men. Every speech made in praise of love must depend on an underlying view about what love is; to praise something is to identify its properties and ascribe goodness to them.

Although rhetoric as a topic is not extensively dissected in the *Symposium*, certainly most of the dramatic action revolves around speech-making as an activity. The symposiasts' speeches, in fact, provide rather good examples of rhetoric as a tool for image creation. Each symposiast speaks in a way that reflects his sense of identity and the self-image he would like the group to affirm and accept.

Furthermore, as the symposiasts take turns speaking, the majority of them take a moment to explain how their speeches will, in at least some small way, improve upon the rhetorical techniques of the previous speaker. These modifications include defining terms or making distinctions between similar but non-identical concepts (such as Pausanias' suggestion at 180d that there is a Common type of love and a Heavenly type). Aristophanes especially alters the rhetorical landscape in a unique and significant way by being the first to attempt to immerse the others in his vision of Love through the use of an original myth. That the symposiasts build on each other's techniques in this way not only means that the *Symposium* becomes a rare example of a Platonic text in which Socratic

⁸ As previously indicated, throughout the dissertation, I appeal to: Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989).

interlocutors voluntarily critique each other well prior to any interference or prompting from Socrates himself, it also means that the *Symposium* dramatizes an experience at the heart of the rhetorical project: characters in the act of negotiating how best to talk about a particular subject--in this case, the subject of Love.

Thus, of the themes *eros*, shame, and rhetoric, it is most controversial whether the *Symposium* should be considered a particularly good dialogue for looking at Plato's view of shame. Starting in the introduction to my dissertation, I have worked to establish that shame is, in fact, an important, though admittedly subtle, theme of the *Symposium*. We can find shame in the *Symposium* in at least three ways:

First and most famously, there is the infamous Alcibiades, who--whether speaking from a place of wonderment or of bitterness or of outright braggadocio--declares that Socrates is "the only man in the world who has made me feel shame" (*Symposium* 216b).

Second, I have argued that (together with Alcibiades), the nested-narrators of the *Symposium*, Apollodorus and Aristodemus, dramatize a condition of misplaced shame that has obstructed their participation in the philosophical life (although, except in Alcibiades' case, their shared condition is never labeled as such). I conclude that none of these three characters has been able to come to terms with the life of philosophy, which demands coexistence with both poverty and resource. Apollodorus is preoccupied with demonstrating his resource, because he has used an association with Socrates (in whom he's able to perceive value) narrowly to escape a pressing sense of his own past "worthlessness," and acknowledging his poverty would presumably threaten this precarious new sense of value, such as it is. But without acknowledging poverty, there is no curiosity, no pursuit of the truth. Effectively, there is no philosophy.

Aristodemus, by contrast, is a resource-denier. Like Apollodorus, Aristodemus is able to see value in Socrates, and he would also like to use his association with Socrates to secure a sense of his own value. But rather than calling attention to his own resourcefulness, Aristodemus is shown trying to attract Socrates' attention to his poverty—perhaps almost to make himself helpless apart from their association, so that Socrates will come to his rescue. Perhaps Aristodemus has in mind that Socrates can be resourceful enough for them both. In any case, the dramatic situation of the *Symposium* raises the question whether Aristodemus may be so ashamed and so hyper-aware of his poverty that he has actually effaced any record of his own philosophical participation from the account of the symposium he passes on to others.

Third and finally, the language of shame also explicitly appears in the *Symposium* within the speeches of the symposiasts. Although emphasis on shame diminishes fairly steadily across the sequence of symposium speeches, the early speakers in particular (Phaedrus, Pausanias, and Eryximachus) want to discuss connections they see between shame and Love.

No one gives more pride of place to shame than Phaedrus, the first speaker in the night's sequence, who proposes that Love is “one of the most Ancient gods,” and “as such he gives to us the greatest goods” (*Symposium* 178c). Phaedrus thinks that every person needs “guidance,” and Love can be credited with providing this guidance in a relatively simple way: “I mean,” Phaedrus says, “a sense of shame at acting shamefully, and a sense of pride in acting well. Without these, *nothing* fine or great can be accomplished, in public or in private” (*Symposium* 178c-d, emphasis mine). That Phaedrus' understanding of *eros* is inexperienced and inexact can be seen right away by

the many slipshod connections between ideas which Phaedrus takes no time to explain or develop. We cannot easily tell why Phaedrus thinks Love is Ancient, or why Ancient gods would give the best gifts, or why shame is the very essence of guidance for right living. Phaedrus is probably just repeating ideas he's heard somewhere before, perhaps with little to no idea what the rationale for them should be. Nonetheless, despite his immaturity, Phaedrus proposes at least one idea that Plato may wish for his readers to take up and examine more closely--because Phaedrus himself (probably without realizing as much) doesn't actually further pursue it. This idea is the claim that love should be credited with our sense of shame. As intended supports for this claim, Phaedrus' speech *actually* supplies Homeric examples to show that being in love makes for particularly intense shame experiences. There is no one, Phaedrus claims, before whom we feel more shame at being found inadequate, than our lover or beloved. Phaedrus uses mythic examples to show the great lengths he believes someone will go to uphold his or her honor under the gaze of love.

I think it's fair to say that the role of shame in the *Symposium* contrasts with the role that Tarnopolsky hopes, based on her reading of the *Gorgias*, shame can play within the *polis*: Shame has not mended Alcibiades' incorrigible conduct, for all that it does seem to have to have caused him some significant pain. Shame has not brought Alcibiades into a healthy concord with his admired-and-detested idol, Socrates, however respectful any Socratic acts of shaming toward Alcibiades may have been. Of course, as I've already acknowledged, Tarnopolsky's view of shame in Plato never hinges on any claim that respectful shaming *always* has a healthy and positive effect, so neither Socrates' failure with Alcibiades (nor his implied failure with Apollodorus and Aristodemus both)

invalidates her view. But perhaps we should say, nonetheless, that if shame has the role in *Symposium* that I take it to have, then the *Symposium* contributes a sense of Platonic pessimism about some shame and its very possible ill-effects. The *Symposium* may not function as evidence against the view that shame can be salutary, but it certainly suggests a missing condition or component under which shame becomes instructive rather than obstructive.

The Gorgias

If the reasons to accept the *Symposium* as a significant source for studying shame in Plato are subtle but significant, then the reasons to accept the *Gorgias*⁹ as an important text in that same study are also significant. As discussed in the previous chapter, the *Gorgias* features a modest but striking pattern of interlocutors who demonstrate, primarily by taking offense on each other's behalf, that they consider shame to be an intelligible and even an expected response to Socrates' attempts to refute them. Because Plato leaves the dramatic situation of the dialogue carefully ambiguous, I have argued, the *Gorgias* doesn't conclusively indicate whether any of its characters has actually been shamed. Rather, it reveals something about the climate of *agonistic* expectation in which these interlocutors are sunk. If the interlocutors of the *Gorgias* were able to see their conversation with Socrates as collaborative rather than competitive, it might be possible for them to adopt Socrates' attitude toward refutation. The Socrates of the *Gorgias* invites refutation, because anyone who can show him he's in the wrong will be doing him the favor of preventing him from continuing in error. And although we don't get to see him

⁹ As previously indicated, throughout the dissertation (except where specifically indicated), I appeal to: Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. W.C. Hembold, (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1997).

put into action the gladdened response to refutation that he promises, (because none of the interlocutors refutes Socrates), Socrates projects that a true refutation would make him feel grateful and glad. Assuming that Socrates' desire for refutation is genuine, and that Socrates is a possible creature, Socrates shows that refutation and shaming come apart. Within the climate of *agonistic* expectation, Socrates models an alternative.

Clearly, rhetoric is also a major theme of the *Gorgias*, since the *Gorgias* is a dialogue specifically devoted to dissecting this concept. What may be less clear is whether the *Gorgias* has anything to do with love. But in fact, there is one particularly important passage that ties *eros*, shame, and rhetoric together in an especially enlightening way.

A likely attempt at shaming occurs in the *Gorgias* when Callicles tries to turn the tables on Socrates and belittle him concerning his age-inappropriate (in Callicles' view) persistence in practicing philosophy. One of Tarnopolsky's critics, Green, calls attention to this incident, asking whether the political efficacy Tarnopolsky attributes to shaming is undermined by Socrates' nonplussed response to Callicles' shaming invective. Despite Callicles' best efforts, Socrates is not shamed!¹⁰ Tarnopolsky rightly answers that her reasons for thinking Plato and Socrates advocate respectful shaming for the sake of *parrhesia* within the *polis* do not depend on the premise that every attempt at shaming succeeds, especially since Tarnopolsky diagnoses Callicles as disposed to "flattering shame" rather than to the "respectful shame" she says Plato and Socrates prescribe. In other words, even if an argument in favor of the political efficacy of "respectful shame"

¹⁰ Jeffrey E. Green, "The Shame of Being a Philosopher: Critical Response to Tarnopolsky," *Political Theory: An International Journal of Political Philosophy* 33, no. 2 (April 2005): 266-272.

did depend on the notion that every attempt at respectfully shaming must succeed, Callicles' failure would be irrelevant, because he doesn't shame respectfully.¹¹

One question neither answers, however, is *why* Callicles' attempt should find no purchase. If Socrates prefers, however ingenuously, at least to pretend that any given philosophical engagement may enlighten him or turn him away from error, *why* should he not be shaken by Callicles' claims that philosophy is an ineffectual disgrace and can only make grown men worse? Socrates and Callicles may have few shared values on the basis of which a shaming transaction between the two might take place, but both of them care whether Socrates' way of life is right or wrong, fitting or disgraceful.

A passage not long before that moment enlightens Socrates' response. Socrates explains something else that he and Callicles have in common. Both, he says, are in love:

... at the moment you and I are both experiencing somewhat the same emotion, and each of us has two objects of his love: I Alcibiades, the son of Clinias, and Philosophy; you the Athenian *Demos* [the people] and the son of Pyrilampes (*Gorgias* 481).

Socrates says that the consequence of this love is also the same for each man:

Now I have noticed that in each instance, whatever your favorite says, however his opinions may go, for all your cleverness you are unable to contradict him, but constantly shift back and forth at his whim. If you are making a speech in the Assembly, and the Athenian *Demos* disagrees, you change and say what it desires; and in the presence of this beautiful young son of Pyrilampes your experience is precisely similar. You are unable to resist the plans or the assertions of your favorite; and the result of this is that if anyone were to express surprise at what you say on various occasions under the influence of your loves, you would tell him, if you wanted to speak true, that unless your favorites can be prevented from speaking as they do, neither can you. Imagine, then, that you are hearing just the same kind of excuse from me. Don't be surprised at my remarks, but rather prevent my love, Philosophy, from making them. It is she, my dear friend, who continues to say what you are hearing from me now; she

¹¹ Christina Tarnopolsky, "Reply to Green," *Political Theory: An International Journal of Political Philosophy* 33, no. 2 (April 2005): 273-279.

is, in fact, far less capricious than any other love. For my Alcibiades says now one thing, now another, but Philosophy speaks always the same and, though you are now surprised at her words, you were present at the whole discourse (*Gorgias* 481-482).

Thus, Socrates explains the character of his speech acts (his rhetoric) in terms of his love--his helpless favoritism--for Philosophy. Although someone like Callicles may express “surprise” at Socrates words--where “surprise” here seems to signify reactions against the strangeness of unfamiliar values, including rejection and distaste--Socrates can’t be shamed out of speaking his words so long as he loves Philosophy most of all. Because a lover of Philosophy will be unable to help himself from saying the kinds of things that Philosophy also loves most. If Callicles wants to shame Socrates into silence, he is going to have to find a way to cause Socrates to fall out of love with Philosophy. Socrates’ love for and allegiance to philosophy are so powerful that they effectively inoculate him against being shamed out of the philosophical life.

Notably, however, according to Socrates’ theory, Callicles loves also, and yet Callicles seems to remain more susceptible to the climate of *agonistic* expectation in which these characters find themselves sunk. That is because Callicles love (for the People, a difficult love to please consistently) renders him *more* vulnerable to shame, rather than less. Callicles’ love, unlike Socrates, is not consistent in its values, and therefore Callicles runs a greater risk of experiencing pain when his values are exposed to the gaze of this capricious other. Thus, where love, shame, and speech acts intertwine within the *Gorgias*, Socrates suggests how one’s true loves have either the power to propel the person toward philosophy and its pursuit of the good--or to inhibit him.

The Phaedrus

The *Phaedrus*¹² is a Platonic dialogue well-known for its divided attention. Socrates' interlocutor Phaedrus has brought Socrates a speech by the orator Lysias which compares the lover with the non-lover: which of the two will make a better companion to a young boy, and to which should the young boy give his "favors"?

Socrates' and Phaedrus' joint consideration of this speech's merits and shortcomings leads to a split discourse, the first half of which will be most explicitly concerned with what would constitute speaking justly and blamelessly about love (a specific rhetorical task, and not unlike the central rhetorical task of the *Symposium*), and the second half with what constitutes good rhetoric, more generally. Of course, the major concerns of these two halves of the dialogue do overlap significantly. After all, Socrates pursues a superior definition of *eros* through the activity of trying out what a good speech about it would be like. At least ostensibly, the sequence of speeches in the dialogue functions like a series of drafts, with Socrates' first speech acting as a revision of Lysias' speech (the speech that Phaedrus so badly wanted Socrates to hear and admire), and Socrates' second, far more excellent speech supplanting his first. In fact, Socrates disowns his first speech in favor of the second, because his divine sign warns him that the first speech is offensive and should not be allowed to stand. As an act of atonement, Socrates offers a new speech, in which he defines love more conscientiously. Conscientious attention to the likeness and unlikeness of similar but non-identical things then becomes a grounding principle of Socrates' discussion about what makes rhetoric

¹² Throughout the dissertation, I appeal to: Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995).

good. Thus, love and rhetoric dominate the *Phaedrus*, but because Socrates takes the responsibility of conscientious speech so seriously, shame also features, if more subtly.

Two important motifs of the *Phaedrus* are (1) that of being overcome and (2) that of translation from one state of being to another. These closely linked images recur near-constantly throughout the dialogue: in the setting, in the dramatic action, in the main ideas Socrates and Phaedrus discuss, and in evocative references to story and myth. Notably, on closer inspection, these two motifs actually figure the two core topics of the *Phaedrus*: love and rhetoric.

Of the two motifs, that of being overcome has the clearest connection to love, especially as Socrates will define love in this particular dialogue. The Socrates of the *Phaedrus* argues that love is a species of divine madness that overtakes the lover; *eros* is a propulsive desire to draw near to the good.

The translation of the individual from one state to another, meanwhile, has a clearer connection to rhetoric, since Socrates holds that “the nature of speech is in fact to direct the soul” (*Phaedrus* 271d). Socrates and Phaedrus eventually agree that any good rhetorician will need to be able to recognize different types of souls and know how to lead them. Metaphorically, the “leadership” of effective rhetoric has the power to bring souls on a journey from some former state to a new one.

In the imagery of the dialogue, however, these two motifs are often not separate but narratively joined. Consider the role of the *Phaedrus*’ unusual, natural setting, for example. Socrates reports having been “charmed” outside the walls of the city of Athens, his usual haunt, by the promise of hearing Phaedrus speak a speech, “for just as people lead hungry animals forward by shaking branches of fruit before them, you can lead me

all over Attica or anywhere else you like simply by waving in front of me the leaves of a book containing a speech” (*Phaedrus* 230d-e). Although Socrates may be exaggerating for Phaedrus’ amusement, his choice of imagery belongs to the dialogue’s overarching pattern; according to Socrates’ little joke, being overcome with *erotic* desire to hear the speech has led to Socrates’ translation from his usual state (remaining within and around the city of Athens) to a new, almost enchanted state (outside the city walls, secluded with Phaedrus on the peaceful, grassy bank of a beautiful stream).

The beauty of this natural setting further inspires Socrates and Phaedrus’ thoughts to turn mythic and poetic. For example, they discuss a local legend according to which an Athenian girl was once carried off by the North Wind, supposedly from a precise spot nearly within view of where they are standing.¹³ Oreitheuia was overpowered and, quite literally, *carried away* by the god--translated from her role as a daughter of Athens into a

¹³ “Couldn’t this be the very spot?” Phaedrus asks. Socrates gives an answer that has always struck me as very funny: “No, it is two hundred or three hundred yards farther downstream, where one crosses to get to the district of Agra” (*Phaedrus* 229c). This response to Phaedrus’ dreamy, whimsical question is amusingly authoritative and exact, but Socrates does go on to explain that he knows because he believes there is an altar there, which admittedly undercuts some of the immediate humor.

Interestingly, if Socrates’ familiarity with the landmarks of this setting comes from firsthand experience, it could be read as Plato hinting that Socrates *does* leave the city more often than we might think.

It’s Phaedrus who says Socrates seems “totally out of place.” Socrates doesn’t correct him, but only offers an explanation of his motives and values, in the form of an apology: “Forgive me, my friend. I am devoted to learning; landscapes and trees have nothing to teach me--only the people in the city can do that” (*Phaedrus* 230d-e).

Socrates has just referred to his Delphic mission at 230a (here interpreted specifically as a quest “to know myself”), to explain why he engages some questions but not others; if Socrates does not yet “know himself,” then the time to answer questions about mythical beasts, for example, has not yet arrived. It makes sense to think that Socrates belongs in the city insofar as being within the city promotes his self-knowledge, and that Socrates belongs outside the city, in nature, insofar as nature can promote his self-knowledge.

figure of myth (*Phaedrus* 229b-e).¹⁴ Socrates also says he can explain where cicadas come from; they, too, were overcome and translated from one state of being to another. Once, the cicadas were humans who fell in love with music and with the Muses. Their love for the pleasure of singing was so complete that they forgot to do anything else, even to the point of abandoning their basic sustenance, “so they died without even realizing it” (*Phaedrus* 259b-d). Yet, having passed from life to death, their total devotion to the Muses was rewarded by a second translation from death back to life again. They were remade as cicadas so that they might continue to sing all day long, as overcome with love as they had been in life.

Of course, Socrates entertains a second theory about Oreithuia, also: that the wind carried Oreithuia to her death. This scenario also involves a translation from one state to another: life to death translation, just as in the myth of the cicadas. Ominous and/or fatal elements feature in several of these examples of being overcome and subsequently translated to a new state of being, and it is not always clear when we should interpret the translated individual’s new state as positive or improved. This subtlety is in keeping with the important and complex role of madness, as a category, in the dialogue. When madness overcomes the individual, it can be an irrational and harmful madness or it can be a divine and inspiring madness. For the individual to be overcome and translated from one state to another is a highly dangerous and mysterious thing.

¹⁴ When *Phaedrus* asks Socrates whether he believes the story of Oreithuia, Socrates demurs. He describes a type of person that *would* be skeptical about the story and says if he *were* such a person himself, his skepticism might be justified. But on the whole, Socrates seems to be trying to tell *Phaedrus* that the question isn’t of the sort that interests him.

What these recurring motifs and their frequent unity reveal, I believe, is that structurally, rhetoric *must* be placed alongside love in the *Phaedrus* in order for Plato to offer them to the reader for conceptual comparison. Falling in love, the Socrates of the *Phaedrus* has argued, is a species of divine madness; a person truly in love is *erotically* overcome by the propulsive desire to draw near to what seems good. Subsequently, by means of love's overcoming, a person may be translated from one state of being to another. Meanwhile, rhetoric attempts to use language to lead souls and introduce change into them. The aim of rhetoric is precisely to translate hearers or readers from one state of being to another, and the best work for rhetoric would be to lead souls toward goodness with such vitality and efficacy that those souls would actually fall in love with the good.

I believe Plato compares *eros* and rhetoric in the *Phaedrus* so that readers will recognize the analogy between their mechanisms; either rhetoric just is *erotic*, opening the beauties of its subject up to the audience so that they will fall in love with it, desire it, and be overcome and changed, or, at the very least, the comparison is offered to the rhetorician as a suggested strategy or civic role, a way of thinking about how she might most powerfully place herself in the service of the good: If you discover something good, find a way to offer it to others also, to reveal it to them as a love-object. When others are overcome by their love for that good thing, they may be changed.

There is an admittedly *strong* emphasis on the positive edification of souls in this take on rhetoric, one which might make it seem highly implausible as a view of rhetoric as a whole. After all, rhetoric can be angry and punishing and, in fact, justifiably--even imperatively--concern the greatest uglinesses of our experience. But while I *would* maintain that Plato is here analyzing rhetoric as the use of language to present an

audience with a new love object, I don't think that definition implies either a) that rhetoric is never used sloppily, ineffectively, or abusively; rhetoric can certainly be insufficient to lead souls, or the love object may be falsely represented as good, or b) that the emotional tone of the rhetor's expositing "beauty" is always positive, pleasant, or traditionally beautifying, in the expected sense. The *Gorgias* emphasizes rhetoric's potential to deal justice--to punish, even. If justice is defined as a corrective for souls, and the best and noblest rhetoric is here understood as correcting souls by leading them to be overcome by love for the good, then one of rhetoric's chief contributions might be to participate in the translation of souls from a state in which justice isn't loved or recognized to a state in which the souls see the beauty of justice, are drawn toward it propulsively, and will submit to all the pain of social or moral "cautery" for the sake of that beautiful and appropriate vision.

The *Phaedrus* also points to an underlying explanation why souls will often need the help of persuasion to fall in love with the good. It has to do with the difficulty of *seeing* and *remembering* the truth. Although figuratively seeing and literally remembering aren't just alike, the dialogue suggests an important kinship between the two ideas with respect to keeping the truth *in view*. Human souls have a poor aptitude for keeping hold of the truths they may once have glimpsed. They strain for a glimpse of the true and the beautiful. They need to be shown and reminded.

Socrates' first, disingenuous speech actually functions to reveal a false dichotomy between judgment and *eros*. In the first speech, Socrates speaks as though he assumes that "judgment" is the exclusive seat of "vision" within the soul. It is only through sober "judgment" that souls can see the truth. *Eros*, by contrast, is oversimplified. In the

disingenuous speech, Socrates treats *eros* as synonymous with appetite for pleasure. If there were no more to *eros* than the appetite, then being overcome with its “madness” would certainly be worse than the sobriety of good judgment.

But the second speech, in which Socrates no longer suppresses mention of the divine varieties of madness that the gods give to men as their gift, shows that madness can also be a source of the soul’s “vision.” It is by allowing themselves to be overcome by divine madness that seers and poets are able to glimpse what the sober, uninebriated mind can’t access. Love, posited as a species of divine madness, “sees,” as well. Love glimpses beauty.

Together, the two speeches suggest that sober judgment and submitting to the gift of divine madness are both important, because both enable the soul to “see” something. The most important thing of all is to glimpse the truth and draw nearer to it.

I will further develop the significance of the *Symposium Eros* origin myth in the chapter to follow, but I think one way of capturing what Socrates is doing in his symposium speech would be to say that he is offering *Eros*-the-philosopher to his audience as a new and, notably, *imitable* love object. *Eros* is not beautiful and young and lissome, and he doesn’t possess every good thing. So, understood correctly he’s not enviable anymore than Socrates himself is enviable. In fact, *Eros* copes with inadequacy. But he is able to coexist with his suspension between great poverty and great resource, and that small but important goodness makes him highly relevant as a potential source of insight into therapy for misplaced and obstructive shame.

Although not all of the associates in question are present at the symposium when Socrates delivers his speech, the narrative frame and dramatic action of the *Symposium*

demonstrate a pattern among Socrates' more devoted associates: fixation on Socrates paired with a preoccupation on personal worthlessness or inadequacy. Diotima's lesson of the *erotic* ascent allows that it can be proper to *begin* from love of a single individual--even the body of a single individual--because *eros* is a propulsive force that responds to perceived value, and when one person discovers value in another, it's possible for that moment of "vision" to propel the individual toward an even clearer, better understood vision of goodness.

One of the best contributions Christina H. Tarnopolsky makes in her writings on Plato and shame is her observation that the experience of shame has the potential--even if it is often an underrealized potential--to reveal shared values. I can't experience the sense that I have failed to live up to my own allegiances and values without allegiances and values. Just as the experience of Socratic refutation can point out internal inconsistency in my thought, the experience of shame can point out internal inconsistency in my commitments: I acted, spoke, thought, or otherwise made myself into someone in service of some object of choice, but the experience of my shame proves that I am at least susceptible to some other competing value. If someone sets out to shame me (and succeeds), presumably that person is either calling attention to my failure to live up to a value to which I already claim some allegiance, or is trying to create that allegiance, imposing pressure on me to adopt a new love and to live up to it.

Thus, shame occurs in the interstices between our various competing loves, and the experience of shame calls for us to examine ourselves: which love should have my allegiance? If I continue on my current course, am I remaining faithfully at my post, in service of the good? (In which case any shame I feel in the face of disappointing some

lesser allegiance is misplaced and need not be minded). Or am I foregoing the higher good in favor of a value I have poorly estimated?

“Arousal and Chastening” as a Prescribable Model of Socratic Pedagogy

Earlier in this chapter, I called for a departure from the question whether Plato and/or Socrates advocate shaming (or some specific variety thereof), on the grounds that, although Plato’s Socrates indicates there are times shame is a fitting response, it’s much less clear who should deal shame, when, whether shame will reliably be the emotion we induce, and why we should hope to deal shame,¹⁵ specifically, as opposed to any of the other emotions that someone might experience in response to refutation and correction. Christina H. Tarnopolsky’s writing on shame in Plato makes significant contributions by examining the close relationship between shame and civic candor and in its implication that dealing shame should be considered a permissible outcome of practicing the candor upon which the health of the *polis* ultimately depends. But her theory goes too far in allowing advocacy of respectful shaming to eclipse advocacy of candor itself in her estimation of Plato’s priorities, a valuation I consider unjustified. The dramatic situation of the *Gorgias* provides good evidence for the claim that Socrates strongly values and would prescribe both candid speech and refutation--indeed, Socrates *calls for* candid speech and for refutation on any point on which he himself can be found to be in error--but poorly supports the claim that refutation is an essentially shaming experience. Given

¹⁵ If the pain of shame *is* justice for the soul, then that would be a reason to prefer to induce shame, in circumstances where shame is also fitting. But according to the *Gorgias* model, at least, from which Tarnopolsky derives her theory, it would make more sense to liken shame to the pain that sometimes unavoidably *accompanies* medical treatment than to the treatment itself. When Socrates and Gorgias discuss the physician, who is the body’s analog to the justice-dealer for souls, the physician doesn’t prescribe pain, he prescribes treatments that may be painful.

that Plato's *Symposium* shows shame can also be an obstructive emotion, and given that candid speech, refutation, and shaming come apart, it seems that we would do better to forego emphasis on shame itself and focus instead on the significant epistemic and rhetorical challenges associated with speaking difficult but salutary truths.

On the other hand, there remain good reasons to be interested in an interpretation of Plato that would explain, especially prescriptively, how eliciting emotions and desires can contribute to learning. My dissertation is particularly concerned with Socrates' attempts to offer a therapeutic response to obstructive shame and thereby to promote his friends' preparedness to practice philosophy. In this chapter, I have worked to establish that Plato places thought about shame alongside thought about love in at least three dialogues. If Phaedrus' unexamined thesis from the *Symposium* is correct, then there is a sense in which love gives us our experience of shame. The *Gorgias* dramatizes an incident in which Socrates is protected from shame by the overwhelming love he bears for Philosophy, while Callicles is made more susceptible to shame by the love he bears for the Athenian *Demos*. Is there a kind of emotional and *erotic* narrative Socrates employs when he attempts to apply persuasion transformatively, offering his friends a therapeutic love object?

One of my aims for this chapter has ultimately been to establish something about what the best prescriptive accounts of emotion as a tool of Socratic pedagogy would look like. I believe the best such accounts would have certain anticipatable characteristics:

First, they would ideally be effective and practicable without requiring a true diagnostician of souls. Social and rhetorical uncertainties dictate that it will never be easy to know exactly what another individual deserves or what corrective--what punishment,

even--his soul calls for. I believe Socrates himself, citing skepticism about his own fitness for such justice-dealing, usually approaches corrective for souls more provisionally. He brings souls into contact with beautiful values and difficult but salutary truths. Sometimes, I have argued, to do this, Socrates may employ a particular style of irony that functions as an indictment only if the indictment is recognized as deserved.

Difficult but salutary truths can include insight about the often-discomfiting realities of the philosophic condition itself, living suspended between ignorance and wisdom, poverty and resource. This truth is not difficult because poverty is blameworthy; poverty need not be blameworthy. The truth of the philosophic condition, as Socrates finds it, is difficult to bear, because it derives directly from the state of unfulfilled longing for the Good with which the philosopher, as a lover, must find a way to cope. Socrates rarely claims securely to possess positive knowledge, but he has positive knowledge of his own accumulated experience coping with and engaging in the philosophical life. If Socrates can find a way to convey some of this knowledge to others, it will likely be knowledge that is difficult for them to receive, but ultimately salutary and potentially therapeutic.

Second, the best accounts would privilege truth-telling and refutation *over* the vicissitudes of eliciting specific emotion. Socrates can bring horses to water but can't dictate what they swallow when they get there. He can put his interlocutors (and friends) into contact with some difficult but salutary truths (he can even, for example, ask whether they feel the shame that would be fitting for them to feel), but he can't control how they choose to react to those truths. To make this observation is no way to denigrate emotion or to downplay the potential power of emotion to steer souls.

Third, the best accounts won't neglect to consider the role of love alongside the role of the kinds of painful emotions, such as shame, that occur in response to correction and refutation.

By way of a conclusion to this chapter, I'd like to discuss one example of a model of Socratic pedagogy that I favor because I believe it satisfies these conditions. Gary Alan Scott's book, *Plato's Socrates as Educator*, focuses on what Scott considers to be Socrates' nearest successes at initiating a young person into the philosophic life.¹⁶ Scott observes that, for all Socrates' wit, rhetorical variety, and *elenctic* skill, more often than not, Socrates fails to initiate his interlocutors into any kind of sincere, persistent, motivated engagement with philosophy. Many Socratic interlocutors appear reluctant even to share a single conversation with Socrates or to persist in that conversation until it can be brought to some corporately-beneficial philosophic fruition. Socrates comes closest to converting a young person to philosophy with Lysis and Menexenus (of the *Lysis*) and with Alcibiades (who features in several dialogues). Of course, Socrates' promising relationship with his protégé Alcibiades will still ultimately end disastrously.

Scott analyzes what Socrates is doing right¹⁷ in the dialogues that dramatize these most-promising encounters, ascribing to Socrates a model of "arousal and chastening"

¹⁶ Gary Alan Scott, *Plato's Socrates as Educator* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000).

¹⁷ What Socrates is able to do in these instances likely has as much to do with the youth and character of these specific interlocutors, as well as with the circumstances and settings of the particular dialogues, as it does with the execution of an atypical pedagogical technique. In an upcoming chapter, I will discuss the *Lysis*, and specifically how Socrates tries to help Lysis and Menexenus prepare for participation in philosophy. The boys make for unusually eager, pliant, and cooperative interlocutors, so Socrates is actually able to guide them through a few different dialectical styles and even enact for them his own response to *aporia*. Adult interlocutors are seldom so willing to pursue the

that ultimately aims at setting Socrates' young interlocutors free from the kind of artificially imposed limits that would obstruct their access to the best kind of life. However, the chastening and arousal model also depends on acquainting the boys with natural limits.

In the *Lysis*, for example, Socrates initiates conversation with Lysis, still just a boy, by asking him about what his parents will and will not allow him to do. Each time Lysis reports another activity that's forbidden him--such as racing in his father's chariots or playing with his mother's loom--Socrates directs Lysis' attention to the existence of some limit on his freedom. It's quite possible that being reminded of these boundaries in his life makes Lysis feel small and embarrassed, especially when Socrates's questioning guides Lysis to recall that even the family slaves are sometimes granted freedoms and responsibilities beyond what Lysis himself is permitted. It's also possible that Lysis may feel angry or anxious as the many limits in his life are brought to his attention. According to Scott's model, however, the thrust of the conversation is not to make Lysis feel inadequate. Socrates' purpose is to arouse Lysis' curiosity by showing him how *some* of the limits in his life (the conventional and circumstantial ones) can be removed if Lysis becomes wiser and more knowledgeable, while others will not be escaped, because they are natural limits. Pursuing wisdom cannot make Lysis' power and opportunity unlimited (chastening), but it can open up new options to him (arousal). Lysis needs both lessons in order to evade apathy on the one hand and arrogance on the other. Socrates wants Lysis to fall in love with Philosophy's potential to expand the joy of his experience while at the

discussion wherever it may go. Socrates' unique success at deploying his chastening and arousal techniques in the *Lysis* owes much to the boys' willingness to engage with Socrates without breaking off, overthrowing, or otherwise curtailing the conversation.

same time helping the boy to anticipate some pains and vicissitudes of life that will never come under his control. In essence, we might say that Socrates must bring to Lysis' attention both his poverty *and* his resource. In the fifth chapter of my dissertation, I will take more time for the *Lysis* with the aim of showing how Socrates is able to use his *elenchus* to introduce Lysis (and his friend, Menexenus) to reasoning techniques (resource) that will empower them to create and guide their own philosophical conversations and also to persist in the conversation at those moments when no way-forward seems available (poverty).

One reason to prefer Scott's chastening and arousal model of Socratic pedagogy to Tarnopolsky's respectful shaming model of Platonic pedagogy, is that Scott can make sense of the value of emotions without demanding that the pedagogue micromanage what, exactly, the emotions of refutation might be. Socrates excites Lysis' desire for freedom simply by calling attention to features of Lysis' reality, namely that Lysis is limited--by social convention and standing, by the authority of his parents and keepers, and by any education he lacks--and that freedom has more to offer. He tantalizes Lysis with an incomplete glimpse of the beauty and value of a good life in pursuit of wisdom. But Socrates *also* chastens Lysis by calling attention to features of Lysis' reality; Lysis is limited by his age and inexperience, by his incomplete education. He could strive for more. Emotions occur in response to perceived situations, so it's fair to say that the chastening and arousal model of Socratic pedagogy is one according to which the student is opened up to education through a kind of emotional. But the *exact* character of Lysis' emotional response to his state of limitation-juxtaposed-with-opportunity need not be dictated by Socrates. Socrates also need not be a true diagnostician of souls to "chasten

and arouse” Lysis, because the emphasis of the pedagogy is not on levying punishment for failure but rather on nourishing the soul with reminders of truth--difficult truths, included. Shaming models of Socratic pedagogy that remain silent on the complementary *erotic* component of this kind of flexibly-defined emotional narrative fail to reflect sufficiently on the way souls become aware of and turn toward value, in the first place.

CHAPTER FOUR

Philosophic Preparedness and Socratic Origin Stories: The *Symposium*

Preparedness as a Theme of Plato's Symposium

Within the first line of Plato's *Symposium*, Apollodorus, the dialogue's narrator, implicitly foregrounds the topic of preparedness to practice philosophy, more or less by announcing that he *has* it. Plato has opted to skip over an implied request made by a character only called "friend"¹ and to begin the dialogue with the way Apollodorus answers this request: "In fact," Apollodorus says, "your question does not find me unprepared" (*Symposium* 172a).² Presumably the "friend" has asked Apollodorus to go over the speeches in praise of love that once were given by Socrates and friends at Agathon's symposium.³ We discover as much when Apollodorus immediately launches

¹ Plato's choice not to name the "friend" might be intended as no more than an invitation to Plato's reader to think of him or herself as the one at whom the story is directed. On the other hand, suppressing the "friend's" identity might also be a way of showing that this is how Apollodorus treats a *person* when that person comes to him, genuinely curious for philosophical content. If we don't know the "friend's" identity, we have no reason to think it's a reaction to the "friend's" particular character that drives Apollodorus' intense dialogue-opening performance.

² In this chapter, as throughout the dissertation, I appeal to Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989).

³ Although Plato does elide the "friend's" question at the beginning of the dialogue, there's not too much reason to worry that the actual question was something mismatched to Apollodorus' answer and that Apollodorus has, in fact, gone off-topic. Before very long, the "friend" becomes frustrated with Apollodorus' tendency to rant and (context strongly implies) repeats the exact same request that he made earlier. The friend wants Apollodorus to get down to business and actually *do* what he said he was so prepared to do: "It's not worth arguing about this now, Apollodorus," says the friend; "Please do as I asked: tell me the speeches" (*Symposium* 173e). Thus, it seems reasonable to think that we do know what the question was, even though Plato skipped over it and

into a fairly detailed anecdote about another time, not long ago, he was asked to do the same thing. That is, not only does Apollodorus make a point of highlighting his preparedness to answer a question about the symposium speeches, he takes time away from actually giving that answer to describe a previous time he was equally well-prepared to answer. The anecdote includes subtle built-in testimonials to the quality of Apollodorus' product: "I heard a version [of the symposium] from a man who had it from Phoenix, Philip's son," Apollodorus quotes his former interlocutor as saying, "but it was badly garbled, and he said you [Apollodorus] were the one to ask... Socrates is your friend--who has a better right than you to report his conversation?" (*Symposium* 172b). We learn that Apollodorus acquired this state of high preparedness by taking upon himself a demanding and probably totally voluntary task. He has "made it [his] job" to collect stories about Socrates, to "know exactly what he says and does each day" and to memorize these anecdotes and to be prepared to recite them when he's asked (*Symposium* 173a).

It certainly seems like Apollodorus understands preparation for recitation. Unfortunately, within a few further gestures sketched by Plato, Apollodorus' preparation for healthy engagement in the philosophical life is called into serious question.

kept the focus of the dialogue's introduction on Apollodorus' answer. The choice to begin with Apollodorus seems to have more to do with focusing the reader's attention than it does on raising suspicions about what the elided request may have been.

If the account that Apollodorus goes on to give isn't a precise fulfillment of the request, it would only be in that Apollodorus also preserves and reports on the social context of the party, and not the speeches alone. But that, too, may actually have been the "friend's" hope and intention. We do not see the friend try to interrupt further or hurry Apollodorus along, once Apollodorus gets generally underway. So, overall, there's good reason to think that Apollodorus *is* prepared to recite his content, even as we retain reservations as to whether this preparation amounts to preparation for a philosophical life.

Apollodorus is casually insulting to his conversation partners (and his first-hand source),⁴ cynical, negative to the point of caricature, and describes himself--though perhaps with a sarcastic edge--as both a “failure” and a “maniac.”⁵ And despite his high-strung emotional intensity, he never actually betrays any sign that he loves ideas or the shared pursuit of the truth. Apollodorus does say that his “greatest pleasure comes from philosophical conversation, even if I’m only a listener, whether or not I think it will be to my advantage,” and this attitude could indicate sincere curiosity (*Symposium* 173c). But if the advantage of philosophical engagement is something like hope of avoiding error or perhaps a corrective for injustice in the soul, it’s a bit peculiar that Apollodorus *wouldn’t* strongly prioritize seeking philosophic conversations of the sort that are to his advantage. Consider Socrates, by contrast, often explaining his interest in having a philosophical

⁴ That is, Apollodorus insults *both* his present conversation partner, the “friend,” and his former conversation partner, Glaucon, as revealed in Apollodorus’ own anecdote about the time he told Glaucon the story of the *Symposium*. Apollodorus goes out of his way not only to insult the person he’s talking to now, but to recount having similarly insulted the other man who recently made the same request.

⁵ See *Symposium* 172b-173e. Interestingly, Apollodorus’ epistemic confidence that his conversation partner (and whomever else is included in “all of you”) is a failure exceeds his confidence that *he* himself is a failure, but in the end, he thinks they all are, only apparently excepting Socrates. The main difference in their respective degrees of failure seems to be that Apollodorus has disowned and jettisoned all interests from his earlier life in favor of the sense of value he acquires through his self-appointed (and probably unsolicited) service to Socrates. Although Apollodorus definitely calls himself both Socrates’ friend and companion, when Glaucon asks Apollodorus if he has his account from Socrates himself, Apollodorus cries irritably “Oh, for god’s sake, of course not!” (*Symposium* 173b). Apollodorus does have a firsthand source, of course. Aristodemus was a symposium attendee. But Apollodorus’ vehement, totally dismissive reaction to the idea that he learned this dialogue from Socrates himself seems to be significant evidence against the idea that Apollodorus and Socrates are collaborating together to preserve knowledge about “exactly what [Socrates] says and does each day” (*Symposium* 172c-173a).

conversation *in terms of* his hopes to receive an advantage from it.⁶ Apollodorus does seem quite interested in--and perhaps even reliant on--a kind of status or self-regard that comes to him from his close association with Socrates, and he calls life prior to philosophy and his alliance with Socrates “worthless,” (*Symposium* 173a). So something about philosophy is a high priority for Apollodorus. But Apollodorus’ professed allegiance to philosophy seems to amount to something more like a fanatical adjacency to Socrates than to participation in collaborative philosophical engagement.

If Apollodorus values his newly-arrived, unnamed “friend” as a conversation partner, for example, the only sign we see of it is in his avidity for the opportunity to hold forth. And assuming we can judge by Apollodorus’ self-report on their past interactions, we have particularly poor reason to think Apollodorus valued Glaucon as a conversation partner. “Of course,” Apollodorus says that he told Glaucon,

I used to think that what I was doing was important, but in fact I was the most worthless man on earth--as bad as you are at this very moment... All other talk, especially the talk of rich businessmen like you, bores me to tears, and I’m sorry for you and your friends because you think your affairs are important when really they’re totally trivial. Perhaps, in your turn, you think I’m a failure, and, believe me, I think that what you think

⁶ There’s a nice moment from the *Phaedrus* where Socrates actually explains this outlook. “Forgive me, my friend,” he says to Phaedrus, regarding Phaedrus’ claim that Socrates is seldom found in a natural setting, “I am devoted to learning; landscapes and trees have nothing to teach me--only the people in the city can do that” (*Phaedrus* 230d-e). Socrates may be making a little joke about the actual difficulty of finding someone within the city who can teach him, but the joke trades on Socrates’ well-known commitment to positioning himself in the place of greatest philosophical advantage--in the place where he thinks he stands to *learn*, which is the kind of gain that Socrates cares about most.

Tangentially, we might wonder *why* Socrates would think nature a poor teacher and the people in the city--who so frequently let him down--good ones, when it is nature that will inspire him and Phaedrus to call on divine inspiration within the *Phaedrus*, divine inspiration that Socrates claims both to believe in and actually to have received within that dialogue.

is true. But as for all of you, I don't just think you are failures--I know it for a fact (*Symposium* 173a-d).

Apollodorus could easily know something about rich businessman Glaucon that Plato's contemporary readers would not.⁷ There is a chance this tirade is justified. But if so, it's interesting how Apollodorus himself characterizes Glaucon *within his own anecdote*. Glaucon is recalled as quite friendly and appreciative toward Apollodorus and seems genuinely enthusiastic to hear the symposium speeches (*Symposium* 172b). If Apollodorus thinks a man acquires value only through pursuit of philosophy, then his low opinion of Glaucon might be unnecessarily cruel, given that philosophical content seems to be exactly what Glaucon has come asking to hear about.

For Apollodorus, Glaucon and the "friend" seem to function mainly as an occasion to display preparedness. In the Introduction to my dissertation, I argued that Apollodorus' fixation on demonstrating his own preparedness points to a deeper problem. The Socrates of the *Symposium* teaches that Love himself is a philosopher, and that Love is necessarily in-between poverty and resource, wisdom and ignorance (*Symposium* 204a). A lover is someone who strongly desires beauty, truth and/or the good, but either doesn't possess these things or lacks assurance of keeping them.⁸ If every philosopher is a lover,

⁷ Debra Nails identifies the Glaucon of the *Symposium* with Plato's own brother, as well as with the Glaucon of the *Republic*, because she reasons that Glaucon and Apollodorus of Phaleron would have been approximately the same age. That Plato might choose his own brother to play this role opposite Apollodorus is a very interesting possibility. It is worth noting, however, that the balance of Nails' reasoning is significantly more toward establishing the ages of Plato's brothers, not in which dialogues they appear. Debra Nails, *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics*, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002) 154-155.

⁸ See *Symposium* 200a-d, where Socrates and Agathon, in dialogue, establish this point, followed by 202d-e where Socrates portrays Diotima recapitulating the point and using it to further demonstrate to the younger Socrates of the story that if Love himself

then by definition a philosopher must learn to cope with both poverty *and* resource. I believe Apollodorus foregrounds his preparedness so aggressively, because his troubling preoccupation with “worthlessness”--his own and others’--gives him an unmanageable sense of horror at his own former poverty. I have described this preoccupation with worthlessness and this inability to come to terms with both poverty *and* resource, as a sense of shame that obstructs Apollodorus’ participation in the philosophical life. Shame has driven Apollodorus to try to recreate himself as a creature of pure resource, and he is using his alliance with Socrates to do it.

At one point in the *Symposium*’s narrative frame, the “friend” shows he has an existing familiarity with Apollodorus and the special exemption from disparagement that Apollodorus grants to Socrates:

You’ll never change, Apollodorus! Always nagging, even at yourself! I do believe you think everybody--yourself first of all--is totally worthless, except, of course, Socrates. I don’t know exactly how you came to be called ‘the maniac,’ but you certainly talk like one, always furious with everyone, including yourself--but not with Socrates! (*Symposium* 173d).

Socrates certainly casts a long shadow. But rather than engaging creatively with Socrates--as, for example, Plato has clearly done, however historical or fanciful Plato’s literary Socrates may actually be--Apollodorus, from everything he tells us, simply hoards Socratic memoranda, securing a kind of status by transforming himself into a point of access to Socrates’ philosophizing, rather than a practitioner of his own.

And because he’s a part of a dialogue the conceptual crux of which emphasizes the human aspiration for immortality through reproduction--including of human offspring, but more notably of beautiful ideas--Apollodorus’ characterization raises questions about

desires good things but either lacks them or lacks assurance of keeping them, Love cannot be a god, as such.

Socrates' own legacy. Apollodorus is making a kind of assay at immortality on Socrates' behalf by reduplicating Socrates' past words and ideas. But as grateful as Plato's readers may be to him for functioning to grant us our only narrative access to the *Symposium*, it's not clear that Apollodorus is contributing to Socrates' legacy the way Socrates himself would most desire, which would surely be by living an autonomous and sustainable philosophical life and giving more attention to the truth, which cannot be extinguished, than to Socrates the man, who can be.⁹ Nor is Apollodorus' slavish style of "reproduction" quite in keeping with the spirit of Diotima's remarks on the subject, because, as Socrates tells it in his symposium speech, Socrates' teacher Diotima emphasized reproduction as responsive, creative, personal and *renewing*, rather than merely reduplicating. Socrates says Diotima taught that,

...among animals the principle is the same as with us, and mortal nature seeks so far as possible to live forever and be immortal. And this is possible in one way only: by reproduction, because it always leaves behind a *new* young one in place of the old (*Symposium* 207c-d, emphasis mine).

This theme of preparedness in the *Symposium* emerges within a narrative frame and dramatic action patterned over with characters, including Apollodorus himself, who have a shared problem: their growth and fruitful engagement in philosophy are obstructed by their misplaced shame. Apollodorus and Aristodemus, the nested narrators of the dialogue, and Alcibiades, the dialogue's celebrated drunken interloper, bookend the dialogue with their respective displays of failure to coexist with both poverty and resource at once. This failure is a particular problem for any would-be philosopher,

⁹ "If you will take my advice, you will give but little thought to Socrates but much more to the truth" (*Phaedo* 91b). The *Symposium* includes the somewhat similar pronouncement by Socrates: "Then it's the truth, my beloved Agathon, that you are unable to contradict... It is not hard at all the contradict Socrates" (*Symposium* 201c).

because the Socrates of the *Symposium* analyzes the philosophical condition itself in these terms. Philosophers are lovers, and it is the *nature* of a lover to be in-between poverty and resource, as well as in-between wisdom and ignorance. Becoming prepared for philosophy implies becoming prepared to cope with what being a philosopher means.

Thus, ironically, Apollodorus betrays a lack of preparation for philosophy precisely by being so busy trying to demonstrate he's not lacking. Apollodorus hates the thought of his old, unprepared, "worthless" life so much that he has become preoccupied with presenting himself as a creature of pure philosophical resource. He can't bear to confront philosophy's poverty. But philosophy's poverty motivates philosophy's receptiveness, its seeking and scheming after the good. Poverty is not shameful for a philosopher; it is a part of the philosophic identity.

By contrast, Aristodemus, Apollodorus' first-hand source, is so preoccupied with his poverty that he doesn't acknowledge his own personal resource. Aristodemus seems to locate resource and value only outside himself, in Socrates, and wants to acquire that value through being specially favored by him. But Socrates can't seek and scheme after the good on Aristodemus' behalf. If Aristodemus loves wisdom, he must find a way to summon his resources and cope with the philosophic condition.

The unstable Alcibiades, finally, is torn between competing self-assessments: beloved by the *demos*, he continually receives affirming messages that tell him he has all the right stuff and all the right ideas--a veritable wealth of resource with no poverty in sight. But Alcibiades can never really get away from Socrates. That relationship is always coming back to haunt him, reawakening his terrible suspicion that he's actually a creature of deep moral and intellectual poverty.

Plato's character Socrates, as he typically comes across in the dramatic action of a Platonic dialogue, does not seem similarly susceptible to this counter-productive (but perhaps all-too-familiar) type of shame. The conviction that Socrates evinces in the *Apology*, for example,¹⁰ and the abiding, even helpless, love for Philosophy that Socrates speaks about in the *Gorgias*¹¹ could almost be said to have inoculated Socrates against the possibility of being shamed out of the philosophical life. Shame has no power to obstruct Socrates from philosophical collaboration with others, because his *erotic* desire for wisdom and his belief in his special duty to the *polis* help prepare him to cope with poverty and resource at once.

If someone wants to be a philosopher but is unable to coexist with poverty and resource, it makes sense to say that he or she is not yet prepared for philosophy. And what we might expect to see from such a person would be: undervaluing meaningful philosophic engagement (as Apollodorus does), effacing and concealing philosophic

¹⁰ The Socrates of the *Apology* explains that he practices philosophy as a god-ordained vocation and concludes, "Men of Athens, I am grateful and I am your friend, but I will obey the god rather than you, and as long as I draw breath and am able, I shall not cease to practice philosophy, to exhort you and in my usual way to point out to any one of you whom I happen to meet: 'Good sir, you are an Athenian, a citizen of the greatest city with the greatest reputation for both wisdom and power; are you not ashamed of your eagerness to possess as much wealth, reputation, and honors as possible, while you do not care not give thought to wisdom or truth, or the best possible state of your soul?'"

¹¹ I am thinking again of the passage from the *Gorgias* where Socrates explains that people say--indeed, go on repeating--what their best beloved ones would say. They can't help themselves. And Socrates' best beloveds are philosophy and Alcibiades (*Gorgias* 481d-482c).

engagement (as Aristodemus does), or submitting only to shallow, mercurial spates of philosophic engagement (as Alcibiades ultimately does).¹²

So the *Symposium* is a dialogue that foregrounds the notion of “preparedness” through Apollodorus’ opening line and his correspondingly keen interest in demonstrating that, whatever preparedness is, he definitely has it. And when we look at the dialogue more closely, there are at least five special respects in which the *Symposium* turns out to be a particularly good source for further examining what Plato thinks preparation for philosophy might be, whether Socrates is sensible to his friends’ need for it, and, if so, how Socrates might be attempting to add to it:

First, as discussed above, the characters of the *Symposium*’s narrative frame, plus Alcibiades, provide a negative of preparation for philosophy, dramatizing three ways (out of many, surely) that someone could require more of it. I have argued that these particular characters’ most visible, shared failure of preparation for philosophy concerns their obstructive shame.

Second, the Socrates of the *Symposium* makes a rare claim to positive knowledge, specifically about the “art of love.” Socrates seems particularly pleased by the proposal that the symposiasts should each give speeches in praise of Love, calling the art of love “the only thing I say I understand” (*Symposium* 177e). This unusual remark encourages Plato’s readers to look forward to the moment when it will be Socrates’ turn to deliver an encomium to Love; whatever it is that Socrates is going to say, he has promised that this

¹² Alcibiades’ inability to stay committed to philosophy is made even more tragic when we consider the Alcibiades of the *Symposium* alongside the younger Alcibiades of the *Protagoras*, a dialogue where he shows emotional equanimity and philosophical promise. See, for example, *Protagoras* 336c-d, where Alcibiades shows autonomy and good sense.

will be a message about which he has arrived at a true understanding. Ultimately, in the content of that eventual speech, we discover that what Socrates knows largely consists of the qualitative experience of living as a philosopher, in-between wisdom and ignorance and in pursuit of the beautiful and the good. Socrates understands both the difficulty and the possibility of coping with poverty and resource, because it is his own *way of life*. Socrates' positive knowledge is knowledge about preparation for philosophy.

Third, Socrates will tell a story about how he first came to possess this positive knowledge. Rather than simply representing himself as someone who knows, he chooses instead to represent himself as someone who had to *come to know*. Socrates' tutelage under Diotima can function as a kind of Socratic origin story, providing insight into how Socrates *became* prepared for the philosophical life that he lives now.

Fourth, The *Symposium* actually offers two of these Socratic origin stories, if we allow that both Socrates' story about himself as Diotima's student and the myth of *Eros*' birth can be read as self-conscious depictions *of* Socrates, *by* Socrates. Diotima's lesson about love famously includes an origin story for *Eros* himself. The offspring of *Poros* ("resource") and *Penia* ("poverty"), and "a schemer after the beautiful and the good," *Eros* is the paradigm philosopher, and his character and exploits figure coexistence with poverty and resource, in legendary style (*Symposium* 203d). If we agree that *Eros* and Socrates are closely and consciously identified with one another in this passage, then the *Eros* origin myth can double as a second, figurative origin story for Socrates himself. And if the *Eros* origin myth is not just about *Eros* but also about Socrates, then Socrates takes the mythic exploits of *Eros*, the paradigm philosopher, and makes them imitable and human.

Fifth and finally, I will argue that the *Symposium* actually shows an attempted therapeutic intervention by Socrates in action. When Socrates gives his speech in praise of Love, he does not aim merely to offer a conceptually superior understanding of *eros* and to disclose the importance of *eros* in the philosophical life, but also actively to help his friends, by providing a positive and inspiring vision of coexistence with poverty and resource that could, if they would only recognize, receive, and understand it, add to their preparation for philosophy by alleviating their misplaced and obstructive shame.

Socratic Origin Stories in the Symposium: Socrates Learns

Although Socrates has told the symposiasts from the outset that he's knowledgeable in the "art of love" (*Symposium* 177e), when the time comes to display this expertise, he chooses to portray himself not simply as someone who possesses knowledge in the present, but as someone who lacked that knowledge once and had to participate in philosophy--placing himself under someone else's care and authority, moreover--in order to gain it. And since Socrates' knowledge of the "art of love" ultimately turns out to consist, more or less, in knowing what it is like to live as a philosopher and a lover, it makes perfect sense that he had to learn this lesson, and is continuously learning this lesson, through active participation in the philosophical life.

Three simple reasons Socrates might choose to tell such a story about teaching and learning are:

(1) To call attention to the teacher and thereby raise questions about sources of knowledge; to whom, if anyone, can we go when we want to learn something, and what might we expect such a person to be like?

(2) To call attention to the student and thereby raise questions about who learns and whether learners have any special characteristics.

And, (3) To call attention to the relationship between the teacher and the student, and to the circumstances of learning. Does the story portray any special conditions for learning? What actions can teachers and students take together that promote learning? A good answer to any one of these questions might have profound therapeutic relevance.

Socrates' story about teaching and learning certainly calls attention to the identity and character of his teacher. Diotima, the woman Socrates credits with teaching him the "art of love," and whom he cites as the original source of his own symposium speech's conceptual content, noticeably contributes all the most outstanding aspects of their scenes together.

Socrates likely surprises his fellow symposiasts by portraying a woman as the source of his positive knowledge about the art of love. The other speakers have tended to take for granted that virtue is found in the most masculine things and people.¹³ Socrates, however, will explicitly call Diotima, a woman, "wise," not only about love but about

¹³ A particularly interesting example occurs in Aristophanes' myth. According to that myth, there were three original human genders: all masculine, all feminine, and sharing in both. Once the gods had punished the doubled humans by splitting them in half (and thereby making them look like we do today), the sex to which each one was then attracted derived from their original nature. "People who are split from a male are male-oriented. While they are boys, because they are chips off the male block, they love men and enjoy lying with men and being embraced by men; those are the best of boys and lads, because they are the most manly in their nature..." (*Symposium* 191e-192a). It's very difficult to tell how seriously Aristophanes (the comic poet) actually means this, even though Aristophanes begs his hearers *not* to turn his speech into a comedy. Aristophanes has no date to the party, so we don't see his personal preferences on display. The intensity of the preference he states for the male could be hyperbolic, meant as mockery of symposiasts such as Pausanias and Agathon, Eryximachus and Phaedrus, who have come as couples and may be feeling a little self-congratulatory.

additional, unspecified matters outside the scope of what the two of them are shown to have discussed together (*Symposium* 201d).¹⁴ This characterization of Diotima is especially remarkable if we think about it alongside the long struggle that Socrates describes in the *Apology*, to find even one Athenian wiser than himself. We also see that Diotima is a priestess, and that at one point Socrates describes her as speaking like “a perfect sophist” (*Symposium* 208c).

Diotima is a scrupulous and snappish pedagogue, and, at least as Socrates has characterized her, gives almost no indication that she sees Socrates as a particularly special or promising student--unless, that is, the indication be that she persists in their argument, investing her time to get the young Socrates to see sense. At one point, Diotima gives Socrates her account of the *erotic* ascent only after betraying a *low* degree of confidence about whether he'll be able to make use of the knowledge: “Even you, Socrates,” she says, “could probably come to be initiated into these rites of love. But as for the purpose of these rites when they are done correctly--that is the final and highest mystery, and I don't know if you are capable of it” (*Symposium* 209e-210a).

Socrates' picture of the philosophical life under Diotima is interesting because Diotima's refutation of the young Socrates can so easily be placed for comparison alongside Plato's much more familiar characterizations of Socratic refutation, even as the young Socrates can be placed for comparison alongside the older. And Diotima does have certain qualities in common with the familiar, older Socrates in the full flower of his philosophical career. Both are highly attentive to the progress of the argument, and both

¹⁴ We have only one additional probably-non-*erotic* example of Diotima's wisdom from Socrates: “once she even put off the plague for ten years by telling the Athenians what sacrifices to make” (*Symposium* 201d).

are at their fiercest and most direct when they sense that their interlocutor's error is bringing him to the verge of openly-displayed impiety. Additionally, Socrates explains that Diotima's arguments derived their rhetorical force from taking up Socrates' own statements as her premises, which will one day become his own preferred technique. He reports, "she showed how, *according to my very own speech*, Love is neither beautiful nor good" (*Symposium* 201e, emphasis mine).

Interestingly, however, Socrates' story grants Diotima authority and latitude that he rarely, if ever, permits himself. Where the future Socrates will stay carefully ambiguous and ironical about the degree to which he has any authority over the discussion--perhaps even *achieve* his command over the discussion *by means of* being vague about his thoughts and intentions; asserting control and cultivating rhetorical fascination in his audience precisely by ducking the role of authority figure--Socrates portrays Diotima's authority over his younger self as unquestioned and overt. Diotima's style of questioning actually treats the answers to most questions as rather obvious, as if a more dedicated version of Socrates would have arrived at them himself a long time ago.¹⁵ By comparison, the ironic tone that Socrates often takes with his own interlocutors, though perhaps patronizing or cutting, is still significantly less authoritative. However

¹⁵ The most outright example being when Socrates asks, "who are the people who love wisdom, if they are neither wise nor ignorant?" (Clearly, the young Socrates, as depicted in the story, does not so readily identify with this description that he knows the answer right away). Diotima answers him unsentimentally: "That is obvious... a child could tell you" (204a-b).

It is interesting to consider whether the young Socrates should be thought of as philosophic or pre-philosophic. On the one hand, he is not like the contented ignorant persons he and Diotima mention. More than once (such as at 206b and 207c), he reiterates that he needs Diotima, specifically because he wants to learn. On the other hand, he does not identify with the existence of a middle, as yet. He does not seem to know "who are the people who love wisdom?" and at 202a he briskly denies the existence of a category in-between good and bad, antecedent to Diotima's swift correction.

likely it is that Socrates really believes he will be educated or refuted by a given interlocutor, he consistently performs the idea that it might happen at any time. The Diotima Socrates describes does not treat the young Socrates as likely to achieve anything of the kind. Instead, she presides over him, hushing him outright when his misguided beliefs go so far as to imply carelessly unexamined impieties (*Symposium* 201e).

The extent of Diotima's straightforward authority over and discipline of the young Socrates likely reflects her special identity as a character with wisdom--alleged positive knowledge--on many topics. The more-provisional Socrates, just like *Eros* himself, is in-between wisdom and ignorance. His rare positive knowledge on "the art of love" derives from his association with Diotima and from his own persistence in the philosophical life. If Diotima's wisdom exceeds the qualitative experience of coping with philosophy--if, for example, Diotima can speak about the vista of pure beauty at the height of the *erotic* ascent not theoretically but from mystical experience--then for all that Socrates mimics her methods, Diotima represents the kind of teacher Socrates himself cannot be, and the kind of teacher most learners will have to do without. A Diotima would be ideal, but we may have to make do with, at best, a Socrates. As his speech concludes, Socrates will explicitly credit Diotima with acting upon him rhetorically in a way that carries over into the contemporary Socrates' own philosophic habits: "This, Phaedrus and the rest of you, was what Diotima told me. I was *persuaded*. And once persuaded, I try to persuade others too that human nature can find no better workmate acquiring this than Love" (*Symposium* 212b, emphasis mine). Diotima persuaded Socrates, but Socrates *tries to* persuade. This precise choice of words may point at

Socrates' frequent failure to be understood and to make sincere philosophical converts. In other words, although Diotima may be the single most remarkable thing about the *Symposium*'s Socratic origin story, from a therapeutic perspective, her special wisdom may also signal a kind of dead-end: if the secret to preparation for philosophy lies in finding a human teacher as wise as Diotima, then few will. We must consider whether there is another way.

Socrates' story about teaching and learning calls less attention to his particular character as a student than it did to Diotima's particular character as a teacher, because the young Socrates (particularly if Diotima's own assessment of him is to be believed!) is mostly unremarkable. If the young Socrates in the story has any really noticeable characteristics, they involve the tension between his youthful ego, his ignorance, and his awareness of that ignorance. On the one hand, Socrates' describes his younger self delivering wrong answers with such a blithe and puerile confidence that Socrates the symposiast almost certainly intends for his audience to find it funny. On the other hand, on the several occasions when Diotima expresses surprise at the sheer *degree* of the young Socrates' ignorance, Socrates tends to remind her that his ignorance is also his reason for being there with her; if he were more knowledgeable, he wouldn't need a lesson.¹⁶ The presumptuous questions, the presumptuous incorrect answers, and the presumptuous reminders to Diotima that he does know he needs her all serve to show that

¹⁶ "How do you think you'll ever master the art of love if your don't know that?" Diotima asks, after Socrates admits he doesn't know why humans and animals become inflamed with love and desire to reproduce. "But that's why I came to you, Diotima," Socrates answers, "as I just said. I knew I needed a teacher. So tell me what causes this, and everything else that belongs to the art of love" (*Symposium* 207c-d).

the young Socrates is an upstart, but at least his clear admissions of ignorance, however pert they may be, do point ahead to Socrates' potential for becoming a philosopher.

I suggest that Socrates describes his younger self this way not only because he doesn't mind his audience having some amusement at his expense (or even because he wants some of his interlocutors, past, present, and future, to enjoy a picture of Socrates himself very briskly scolded into *aporia*, as if making a little boast that in his younger years, Socrates himself had to undergo the *aporetic* equivalent of walking to school knee-deep in snow, uphill both ways), but because this picture of the ordinary, even embarrassing, young Socrates adds to the therapeutic potential of the lesson in philosophic preparedness that the mature Socrates is getting ready to pass along.

Socrates, giving over authority for the content of his speech to his teacher Diotima, has chosen to depict himself as a student: educationally mutable, impatient for answers, and frequently rebuked in a way that might have felt quite humiliating at the time. But Socrates does not efface his youthful errors. Rather, he makes a point of owning and highlighting the similarities between his own mistakes (as he represents them, anyway) and those of his assembled friends, the symposiasts. He maintains and reinforces an analogy between himself as student and his immediate audience.¹⁷

¹⁷ The analogy between Socrates and Agathon is kept particularly strong. At 201e, Socrates describes himself as having thought quite specifically along Agathon's lines. Then he reinforces this comparison through partially reenacting the same questioning sequence he has used on Agathon in his own origin story. Socrates first takes Agathon through the arguments that he says were used to teach him, then recapitulates those arguments, with added content, as he recounts Diotima teaching them to him in the first place. Because Diotima's version always adds something new, repetition occurs, but the main ideas of the dialogue also further unfold. By way of examples: At 200a, Socrates presses Agathon to affirm that love is desiring. Diotima covers this same point goes further at 204c: she advances the argument to the lover/beloved reversal using love's identity as desire for her basis. She also evolves the argument about love desiring what it

Socrates' learning isn't explained by his being exceptional, because he wasn't. Socrates' tutelage under Diotima is a picture of entering on the philosophical life and of needing to grow into it. We want to know how it is that Socrates was able to receive a lesson that helped him to become prepared for philosophy. The answer might reside in Diotima's special status as "wise," but if it does, that is unfortunate news, because Diotimas are few and far between. The answer does *not* seem to reside in the identity of the young Socrates, but at least the young Socrates' characterization is more encouraging. His ordinariness helps to make him relatable and, more importantly, analogous to any hearers who would benefit by learning the same lesson he did. So we might ask, can this story of teaching and learning explain Socrates' positive knowledge in terms of the actions Socrates and Diotima take together, or the conditions under which the lesson is given?

Socrates' story about teaching and learning calls subtle attention to the kinds of actions that Diotima and Socrates take together: collaborative actions that could help to explain how Socrates learned the philosophic condition. Diotima rebukes and Socrates is receptive to her correction. Diotima speaks and Socrates listens. Diotima refutes. But perhaps the single most important detail of their interaction, as told by Socrates, concerns the duration of the shared inquiry. Completing the anecdote, Socrates summarizes, "All this she told me on those occasions when she spoke on the art of love" (*Symposium* 207a). This remark indicates that it took Diotima and Socrates a long time--several sessions, even--to proceed through the arguments about love to their joint satisfaction. This is a terribly subtle feature of the story, but one that leaps into much sharper relief when

lacks (or lacks assurance of keeping) to point directly to the implication, at 202d-e, that love is spiritual but not a *god*.

considered alongside the mature Socrates' usual interactions with his own interlocutors. The mature Socrates struggles to find an interlocutor who is really willing to "go the distance" with him, someone who cares enough about the truth to persist in the conversation past the point of experiencing refutation and *aporia*. In any given conversation, getting hold of the truth cannot be predicted or assured. But one thing a philosopher and any willing partner *can* assuredly do, so long as they are able, is to persist in the conversation. The young Socrates of the origin story may have been an unremarkable student in most other respects, but it would appear that he shared Diotima's willingness to return to their topic again and again, until they were satisfied. This one subtle point might actually do a good deal to explain how Socrates learned to cope with the philosophic condition: through practice, through imitation of Diotima's interrogative techniques, and through caring enough to endure the significant epistemic discomfort of *aporia*.

Every instance of learning, however small, is a moment of transformation and becoming. When Socrates tells his friends how he passed from a state of not knowing to a state of having learned, he's making a kind of implicit argument from analogy that concludes with a claim of possibility. Socrates learned. So, it is possible for anyone who is relevantly similar to the young Socrates to do so, as well. If the relevant similarity in question is mainly a matter of patience or willingness or budding love for the truth, this story of teaching and learning is accessible and shows therapeutic potential.

Socratic Origin Stories in the Symposium: The Eros Origin Myth

Alongside Socrates' portrait of himself as a young man, we can place the origin story for *Eros* that Socrates also credits to Diotima. Socrates claims that prior to

Diotima's lessons, his ideas about *Eros* were very similar to those of his fellow symposiast, Agathon, who described *Eros* as possessing all beautiful and good things (*Symposium* 201e). *Eros*' true identity, as revealed in the origin myth, is a significant aspect of Socrates' positive knowledge in the art of love.

Diotima's *Eros* myth bears on the discussion of preparedness for philosophy in a few ways. First, Diotima explicitly characterizes *Eros* himself as a philosopher, who is in between wisdom and ignorance. In fact, it would be fair to say that from the moment wisdom is posited as a love-object for *Eros*, emphasis shifts dramatically to Love's pursuit specifically of Beauty and of Truth and away from other sorts of beloveds. Thus, even if the *Eros* of the myth bore no resemblance to any particular philosopher characterized in Plato's dialogues, *Eros* would still function as a paradigm of preparedness for philosophy. *Eros* himself is a philosopher, and his heroic traits and escapades, as described in the origin myth, dramatize his adaptation to a mythic semblance of the philosophic condition.

Second, Socrates himself, despite (and, at the same time, on account of) his human shortcomings, also functions as a paradigm of philosophic preparedness. Socrates almost never declines to participate or to persist in the conversation.¹⁸ Socrates almost never betrays a failure of enthusiasm for the highest things. And because the *Eros* of Diotima's myth closely resembles Socrates, we can imagine our knowledge of each of the two figures rounding out our impressions of the other and uniting in a multifaceted depiction of preparation for philosophy. Socrates' often-inscrutable choices and

¹⁸ There are examples, however. Socrates is reluctant to stay and converse at the beginning of the *Republic* (327a-328b), and he threatens to quit the conversation in the *Protagoras* (335b-c).

behaviors can be elucidated by explanations taken from the metaphors of the *Eros* origin myth. And the metaphorical abstractions of the *Eros* origin myth can be paralleled with the human behavior of the character Socrates, as we find him in the dialogues. Eros can be imitated through imitation of Socrates, and vice versa.

It's customary to remark on the self-referential details that Socrates includes when he describes *Eros*--that is, to suggest that when Socrates retells the *Eros* origin myth he deliberately causes Love to resemble himself: spirited, vigorous, homely and shoeless. Of course, the *Eros* origin myth is actually attributed to Diotima; Socrates does not claim it as his own creation. But as it seems so likely that Socrates is *at least* tailoring Diotima's material to his immediate context to make it a particularly good fit, it wouldn't be terribly surprising if he had enhanced the resemblance between himself and the paradigm of philosophic preparedness, as a way of calling attention to similarities between the two of them. These self-referential characteristics to the *Eros* origin story can certainly be judged in more than one light. Are they cheeky and charming? Or smug and self-aggrandizing, for example?

On the other hand, if for a moment we take seriously the actual chronology that Socrates has given concerning his education in the art of love, the influences would *actually* occur in this order: Diotima fascinates a young and philosophically-inexperienced version of Socrates with the *Eros* origin myth, and now, *subsequently*, the Socrates of the future has come to resemble her story. *Eros* and Socrates are alike. But the fundamental ambiguity of the dialogue form leaves open the question whether we should read Socrates as having made Love over in his own image through the act of

retelling Diotima's story, or whether Socrates received Diotima's lesson and took Love for his second teacher, making *himself* over in the image of Love.

When the origin myth is viewed from the latter perspective, it calls again for Socrates' auditors to see the argument from analogy that concludes with a claim of possibility: what Socrates learned, those who are relevantly similar to Socrates can learn also. What Socrates came to terms with, those who are relevantly similar to Socrates can come to terms with, as well. If the *Eros* myth as a story of *erotic* bravery and *erotic* thriving is uncoupled from those little winking autobiographical details that give *Eros* his readily recognizable human counterpart, the therapeutic potential of the story to excite a spirited and encouraging response is actually diminished.

Of course, importantly, we don't have to abandon any suspicions we might have about a self-aggrandizing Socrates in order to make this observation. In fact, the fundamental ambiguity of the Platonic dialogue form allows for fruitful but contrasting interpretations of Socrates' character to coexist, side-by-side or even merged into one. Concerns about Socrates' possible arrogance remain compatible with the observation that Socrates may be inviting comparison between himself and the *Eros* of the origin myth, with therapeutic and generous intentions.

Eros as Philosopher-Paradigm: His Characteristics and Deeds

First of all, as is plain but not insignificant, Diotima's origin story for Love clearly specifies that *Eros* is a lover rather than a beloved (*Symposium* 204c). The young Socrates was apt to assume, just as Agathon does at the symposium, that Love is young and beautiful and wise, possessing all good qualities. It is appropriate for the good and the beautiful to be love's objects, but Love himself is not identified with the beautiful and

the good. Love, although a mediating spirit that partakes of the divine, is sketched in such a way as to have greater conceptual kinship with the human lovers who parallel his activity by imperfectly yet spiritedly pursuing what they desire, than he does with gods. Diotima treats this cancelation of a beloved-centric model of *Eros* in favor of what she considers to be the proper, lover-centric model as a correction of the young Socrates' most foundational mistake (*Symposium* 204c).

Diotima's personification of Love in the *Eros* origin myth functions much better as a description of the philosopher, specifically, than of the lover, more generally. It is possible that love itself, as a fully realized concept has been, by this juncture, left behind, and that the real core of Socrates' concern has now revealed itself to be: what a person really needs (that is, wisdom and to draw near to the good) and how to function when he possesses it at best only a little, provisionally, imperfectly, and unreliably.

In Love's origin myth, we witness descent from and coexistence with poverty and resource.¹⁹ Love is in-between wisdom and ignorance, because he is the offspring of apparent opposites, and he shares in the natures of both his parents:

As the son of *Poros* [resource] and *Penia* [poverty], his lot in life is set to be like theirs. In the first place, he's always poor, and he's far from being delicate and beautiful (as ordinary people think he is); instead, he is tough and shriveled and shoeless and homeless, always lying in the dirt without a bed, sleeping at people's doorsteps and in roadsides under the sky, having his mother's nature, always living with Need. But on his father's

¹⁹ Mary Nichols correctly observes that "middleness" is present already in the characterization of Love's parents; *Eros* is an effect whose properties were already at work in his joint causes. *Poros* is resourceful, but he would not have got a child without the contribution of *Penia*. *Penia* personifies poverty, but she is the one who concocts the scheme to conceive a child with *Poros*; therefore, she also has her own kind of cunning. Mary P. Nichols, "Socrates' Contest with the Poets in Plato's 'Symposium'." *Political Theory: An International Journal of Political Philosophy* 32, no. 2 (April 2004), accessed March 2, 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0090591703256093>.

side he is a schemer after the beautiful and the good; he is brave, impetuous, and intense, a genius with enchantments, potions, and clever pleadings. (*Symposium* 203c-203e).

Penia, the name of Love's mother, may effectively be translated "poverty." But the word connotes a condition of want more extreme than "making do with little." In fact, it can connote outright deprivation--making do, somehow, with less than what one needs. *Poros*, the name of Love's father, comes from the same root shared by *aporia* and the English "porosity." At its most literal, it signifies an opening, a way. Hence, the individual stuck in the *aporetic* state that Plato's Socrates has made famous can find no aperture, no way forward.²⁰ To whatever extent Love resembles his father Poros, (or his grandmother Metis, "cunning"), Love seeks a way forward. Thus, the lover of wisdom is the one who always seeks a way through to knowledge, even though he doesn't have enough, on his own recognizance, either to sate his desiring or even to meet all his own needs.

Poros' name also connotes contrivance. In some versions of the Greek mythology, he is identified with the ancient Cronos himself and is considered a creation deity.²¹ Socrates may have wished that friends and fellow symposiasts would recall the etymological connection to *Poros'* contrivance and search for an aperture, a way forward, when they experience the discomfiting state of *aporia*. To experience *aporia* is to see no way forward. But also implicitly present in the moment of *aporia* are the philosopher's

²⁰ Sarah Kofman also observes this etymological relationship, objects to the way it is generally concealed by translation, and makes it the basis for her further thesis that *aporia* is untranslatable. Sarah Kofman, "Beyond Aporia?", in *Post-Structuralist Classics*, ed. Andrew Benjamin, (London: Routledge, 1983), 7-44.

²¹ Mark Morford, *Classical Mythology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 133-134.

endowments of *erotic* resource--shrewdness coexisting with the discomfiting feeling of being at a loss.

In Diotima's story, *Eros* is actually conceived at the celebration of Aphrodite's birth, through an act of scheming and subterfuge. *Poros*, an invited guest, becomes drunk and falls asleep in the garden. *Penia*, uninvited, comes "begging, as poverty does when there's a party" (*Symposium* 203a). *Poros* has partaken amply of the party's offerings, and *Penia* arrives to see what she can get--in more than one sense. Coming across the unconscious *Poros*, *Penia* reasons that giving birth to his child, the child of Resource, will change her status.²² So she sleeps with *Poros*, and *Eros* is conceived. Notably, Love's genesis occurs when his parents have both drawn near to Beauty, though one is asleep and the other is focused on relieving the condition of her poverty. Also notably, despite *Penia's* hope that *Eros's* birth would change her circumstances and, thereby, in a sense, her very identity, not even *Eros* himself escapes living with the Need that he inherits on his mother's side.

Socrates stands in for the offspring of *Poros* and *Penia* at the symposium itself, by resembling both of Love's parents in some respects, and neither completely. Like *Penia*, Socrates arrives late at the symposium, and he lingers outside the gates of

²² It is interesting to compare *Penia* with the *Symposium* characters who improperly love Socrates. If *Penia* ceases to be poor, she changes not just her circumstances but her identity (as fundamentally *lacking*). She would like to relieve her poverty through possessing *Poros* and creating an offspring with him, whether or not *Poros* wills it. Apollodorus, Aristodemus, and Alcibiades all seem to share a desire to change their identities in some way through forcing a special alliance with Socrates, as well. If all humans are pregnant, as Diotima claims, with something inside themselves that they would like to bring to birth, then presumably these three flawed characters would like their connection with Socrates to bring something to birth. But what? What do they hope will be the offspring of the relationship? And is it possible for the offspring of such a human miss-match of desires to be something in-between good and bad, the way *Eros* is in-between good and bad?

Agathon's home, suggesting his outsider status. Socrates lingers resourcefully, however. The other symposiasts aren't certain what Socrates is getting up to, but when he's discovered, he appears to be deep in thought.

Again unlike *Penia*, Socrates is ultimately welcomed, and embraces the role of a valued guest with much to offer the shared celebration. Socrates' claim to positive knowledge promises that although he may be playing the role of the social beggar in other respects, he has something to give. Yet unlike *Poros*, Socrates' conduct at the symposium exemplifies alertness, almost heightened consciousness.²³ If Socrates mimics *Penia* by perpetrating a kind of seduction at Agathon's party--a seduction to the life of philosophy--he accomplishes it by trying to add to the awareness of the symposiasts rather than lull them to sleep. Additionally, the Socrates of the *Symposium* seems to draw near to Beauty mindfully, seeking like-mindedness, in the hope of begetting beautiful ideas together.

To highlight Love's resourcefulness, qualities and habits that suit him to pursue what he desires, particularly beauty and wisdom, are imaginatively enumerated. First, Love is a highly spirited character, "brave, impetuous, and intense," but that spirit is neither unassailable nor inexhaustible. Physically, of course, Love isn't beautiful, because if he were to possess Beauty he wouldn't be a lover of the beautiful. But Love's appearance is not merely unbeautiful; it shows significant wear and tear. He is "tough and

²³ Socrates alertness is highlighted by a vignette from near the end of the dialogue: Aristodemus falls asleep and therefore cannot report on any events which take place until he wakes up again. When he does, it is almost dawn, and Socrates is *still* conversing with Agathon and Aristophanes (*Symposium* 223c-d). Not long after Aristodemus wakes, Aristophanes and Agathon finally succumb--"in the middle of the discussion," in Aristophanes' case! Aristodemus, who then leaves the party with Socrates, reports that Socrates went about his usual business and did not retire to bed until evening came again, at the usual time (*Symposium* 223d).

shriveled and shoeless and homeless”--marks of aging, poverty, and struggle (*Symposium* 203c-d). Love’s appearance betrays signs of his long struggle to possess the good. And being:

neither immortal nor mortal... now he springs to life when he gets his way; now he dies--all in the very same day. Because he is his father’s son, however, he keeps coming back to life, but then anything he finds his way to always slips away, and for this reason Love is never completely without resources, nor is he ever rich” (*Symposium* 203d-e).

Love’s “way” is to possess the beautiful, the true, and the good, and ideally never to be parted from them again, a state of affairs his in-between nature tragically denies him. Still, it would seem that the power of Love’s spirit to rebound back to life, zeal and activity derives from his native share in resource and from receiving inspiration at those times he is able, even briefly, to take hold of a beautiful insight. Based on this quality of Love, it makes sense to say that preparation for philosophy involves preparation to take hold of the good but also preparation to lose one’s grip on it.

If Socrates and *Eros* are alike, then Socrates, too, is calloused and worn and loses his grip on the good things he’s worked so hard to take hold of (perhaps within a single day!) And sometimes his formidable *erotic* spirit dies away. We seldom clearly see this side of Socrates’ character, if at all. What does Socrates look like, at the moment the spirit dies away? Socrates may be trying to disclose to the other symposiasts this aspect of his philosophical experience in a way that will evade accusations of ironic false modesty. And, in fact, it’s possible that the *Symposium* actually enacts, symbolically, a moment of Socratic loneliness and *aporia*, as a way of reminding Plato’s audience that Socrates is himself susceptible to bafflement and to discouragement.

Near the beginning of the dialogue, Socrates approaches Agathon's house with Aristodemus (the witness from whom Apollodorus will one day have his account of the party) but becomes deeply preoccupied with his own thoughts and keeps stopping along the way. Socrates encourages Aristodemus to go on ahead without him, with the consequence that Aristodemus--carelessly, it would seem--arrives at Agathon's gate without realizing that Socrates isn't behind him, and is brought inside, alone, by a servant before he can avoid being seen (*Symposium* 174e).

Agathon's gate is an aperture--a way-forward. Aristodemus, who denies his resource and fixates on his poverty, hardly even notices that he "[finds] the gate wide open" and can easily pass through, because he's not particularly happy about the embarrassment and exposure he feels when the other guests see him arrive alone and uninvited. Socrates, meanwhile, is seen not long after, standing still outside Agathon's gate, on the neighbor's porch (*Symposium* 175a). Presumably, by contrast with Agathon's wide-open gate, the neighbor's porch is closed to Socrates. Although we can probably assume that Socrates the character knows the way to his own friend's gate, this tableau may signal that Socrates is, himself, caught in a lonely moment of *aporia* and has not yet found the aperture that would permit him to go forward. Thus, he stands still, outside the gate.²⁴

Alternately, this same moment of Socratic privacy could be designed to speak to Socrates' philosophic *receptivity*. Perhaps Socrates is on the trail of some insight, and unwilling to break off his pursuit until he knows whether or not he can take hold of his quarry? Although to outside eyes Socrates stands still, it might be more accurate to

²⁴ Meanwhile, Aristodemus the resource-denier can go through the gate but doesn't altogether value it.

imagine him lying in wait. In the Eros origin myth, Diotima credits Love with several skills and activities that demonstrate his *strategic receptivity*, perhaps most notably hunting and entrapment. As “an awesome hunter, always weaving snares, resourceful in his pursuit of intelligence, a love of wisdom through all his life...” (*Symposium* 203d), Love’s creativity is not to create the object of his desire but to create the means of ensnaring it. He stalks it and searches for it, tries to pin it down. Love’s traps lie empty and open, an image of his poverty, but, *as traps*--and hand-made traps, at that--they also speak to his resourcefulness, ready to spring shut and capture what he loves in the hope that this time he may keep it. If Socrates’ delay in arriving at the party functions as a demonstration of his strategic receptivity, then it may be Apollodorus (the replete, the ever-prepared) with whom Socrates’ waiting on the possibility of a glimpse at knowledge is juxtaposed.

The highly strategic character of Love’s receptivity is indicated not only when Love is specifically characterized as “a schemer after the beautiful and the good,” but by the suggestions of method, practice, craftsmanship, and even stealth that are conjured by Diotima’s hunting imagery. Nonetheless, Love’s cunning is clearly imperfect. Not only is Love notoriously unable to keep what he gets ‘hold of, but though both Love’s parents are schemers, Love’s mother *Penia* schemes crudely, recklessly, unjustly and unwisely.²⁵ Sharing as he does in the natures of both parents, presumably Love is drawn to some cunning and to some foolhardy schemes.

²⁵ We know that *Penia* schemes, and we also know that she is not wise. Moreover, her treatment of *Poros* indicates that for the sake of her selfishness, she will exploit another person.

When Alcibiades, who doesn't arrive in time for Socrates' speech and therefore doesn't hear the *Eros* origin story, later accuses Socrates of laying traps for people, his choice of metaphors makes an implicit connection between the *Eros* origin myth and Alcibiades' own speech "in praise of" Socrates. And indeed, given that Diotima also calls Love a spell-caster, "a genius with enchantments and clever pleadings," Alcibiades may not be incorrect. Despite evident tensions between Socrates' intended relationship with his audience and his unintended relationship with them,²⁶ Socrates does exercise a certain fascination over others. But it is worth noting that *Eros* himself is not necessarily described as an entrapper of persons. He is "resourceful in his pursuit of intelligence." Since Love is a lover of wisdom, beauty, and the good, it makes sense that his traps would be intended to lay hold of *insight*, because an insight is an addition to or enhancement of one's relationship with truth.

But then again, one aspect of Love's character on which Diotima remains nearly silent is Love's social identity. Although Diotima makes clear that many things and people are in-between good and bad, within Love's own myth, he seems to act alone, almost as if he is the only one of his kind. The apparent isolation of Love contrasts with the *erotic* desire of human lovers to come together, approach Beauty, and give birth (whether to human offspring, beautiful ideas, or some other means of approximating immortality) in Diotima's teachings.

We may wonder at the full significance of Love's homelessness, as well as his sleeping in the open, "on the dirt without a bed... at people's doorsteps and in roadsides under the sky..." (*Symposium* 203d). Of course, these conditions are emblematic of

²⁶ See the *Apology*, which I will develop in the next chapter.

poverty, and Diotima herself points out the most obvious implication: that Love always and necessarily coexists with Need (*Symposium* 203d). Love is so poor as not to be furnished with a comfortable home, so he does without luxuries, maybe even without rest, living with discomfort and the publicly observable marks of his poverty (a nod to the possibility that Love himself must perhaps overcome shame). But there may be a further significance here. Not only does Love do without a home, but when the *Eros* myth lays him down to sleep on others' doorsteps, it also, by consequence, shuts him *outside the homes of others*.

That Love is apparently able to remain in hot pursuit of Beauty and Truth without the help and support of a like-minded community may be intended as an encouragement to the autonomous and lonely nascent philosopher. Philosophical kinship is resource, but, after all, Love persists even where he must make do with less than what he needs. On the other hand, the political and social dimension may be the point at which Socrates' positive knowledge--not to mention the analogy itself between *Eros* and Socrates--breaks down, and only hope and desire are left. Socrates knows firsthand what it is like autonomously to cope with Need and deficit, to seek a way-forward, to persist in the conversation, and to contrive the methods and techniques by which to do so, but whereas Love is a spiritual being, able to mediate between the merely human and the divine, Socrates' has failed many times to bring his own aspirations toward the divine into the lives of others and securely anchor them there.

Chapter Conclusion: A Therapy for Whom?

There's no question that Plato's *Symposium* tells a sad story or two. There are the sundered half-people of Aristophanes' speech, for example. However sincerely or snidely

he intends it, the speech of Aristophanes captures the unfulfilled human longing for permanent unification with a companion whose love, whose total belonging with the self, would make a person at last feel complete (*Symposium* 191d; 192b-c). And although we may not respond to Alcibiades' thwarted desire to possess Socrates by wishing that he'd finally get what he wants, the nakedness--the outright graceless public misconduct--of Alcibiades' pain is certainly affecting.²⁷ It calls into question whether Socrates has done right by his young friend.

But here's a sad story the *Symposium* may have been telling all along, which I have not heard pointed out before now: According to the narration which comes to us by way of Apollodorus, Socrates meets Aristodemus (Apollodorus' firsthand source) on the way to Agathon's symposium. Aristodemus, who seems helplessly fixated on his friend Socrates, can hardly abide the thought of being so presumptuous as to crash Agathon's party, but, as he practically calculates aloud, if he were to arrive as the particular companion of Socrates, who is a highly desirable party guest, the imposition would become bearable (and maybe even a very pleasant way to spend an evening).²⁸ As Aristodemus and Socrates walk along together, Aristodemus drops flirtatious hints designed to communicate to Socrates how important it is to him that they stick together, that Socrates watch out for him and give him countenance. The hinting is clumsy and a little embarrassing. "Mine is a case of an obvious inferior arriving uninvited at the table of a man of letters," says Aristodemus to Socrates. "I think you'd better figure out a good

²⁷ Beginning with 213c, in particular.

²⁸ See 174c-d: "Mine is a case of an obvious inferior arriving uninvited at the table of a man of letters. I think *you'd* better figure out a good excuse for bringing me along..." Said Aristodemus, before coming up with the excuse himself.

excuse for bringing me along, because, you know, I won't admit I've come without an invitation. I'll say I'm your guest" (*Symposium* 174c-d).

But Socrates, whether simply oblivious, otherwise preoccupied, or carefully unwilling--as he seems to have been with Alcibiades also--to let the fantasy play out as Aristodemus has imagined, continually wanders off, forcing Aristodemus to choose his own trajectory and, thus, arrive at the party uninvited and alone, after all (*Symposium* 174d-e). Aristodemus is given a seat to share with fellow guest Eryximachus, (though he doesn't describe even a bit of dialogue passing between them). So long as Socrates is missing from the party, Aristodemus stays visible in the account, asking on Socrates' behalf that no one be sent to interrupt Socrates and bring him in. When it comes to what Socrates would want, Aristodemus knows best (*Symposium* 174e-175e).

Socrates, when he finally turns up, is eagerly appropriated by their handsome young host and guest of honor, Agathon (*Symposium* 174d-175d). And now, as the guests agree to their choice of topic for the evening, Aristodemus practically disappears from his own story. Aristodemus' date with Socrates does not seem to be going well.

Based on the limited information available, Socrates doesn't seem to go out of his way to speak to Aristodemus at any time during the evening. If Aristodemus did give a speech and Socrates had any reaction to it, we do not learn of it. Instead--though due at least in part to the speaking order upon which all the guests have agreed--Socrates ostensibly tailors his speech to refute his seatmate Agathon, (who, for his part, seems to delight in the attention). Eventually, well after the structured portion of the evening is over, when many of the guests have gone home, Aristodemus falls asleep and wakes at dawn to find Agathon, Aristophanes, and Socrates still awake, talking (*Symposium* 223c-

d). Aristodemus and Socrates leave together, and Aristodemus evidently remains with Socrates long enough to know that Socrates spent that whole day “just as he always did, and only then, as evening was falling, went home to rest” (*Symposium* 223d).²⁹

But Aristodemus’ potentially keen disappointment at an evening with Socrates gone wrong is not at the heart of the sadness in this particular story. Rather, it is the stinging irony that Socrates’ therapy, his description of Love himself as a philosopher who is in between wisdom and ignorance, and who displays a positive, even heroic, attitude in response to his essential suspension between poverty and resource, may well have been directed most specifically at Aristodemus: to assuage discouragement and unsalutary self-abasement in a friend who might like to practice philosophy, but who seems to have become obstructed by his own sense of shame, and to add to that friend’s preparation for a procreative, collaborative philosophical life.

²⁹ When Aristodemus and Socrates leave together, the dialogue reports that Aristodemus “followed [Socrates], as always” (*Symposium* 223d). Anne-Marie Schultz has challenged me to consider whether Aristodemus’ following Socrates might signal a received therapy--a kind of conversion. It is a very interesting point, as “following” Socrates indicates a shared direction and might well be indicative of some philosophical kinship. In this case, however, I think there are a few reasons such a conversion is unlikely, at least based on this passage. First, Aristodemus follows “as always,” according to his usual custom. If we have reason to doubt that Aristodemus’ characterization presents as healthful in the dialogue, then his continuance in an existing habit or “following” does not likely indicate a turn. Second, if Aristodemus does efface his own philosophical participation at the symposium when he tells the story to others, the retelling would take place after the posited conversion to a more Socratic mindset. Third, at least given the foregoing considerations, Aristodemus’ “following” might be given as another example of his replication of Socrates/his established willingness to give authority for their activities over to Socrates, rather than being self-directed. Some of these points are specific to the reading of *Symposium* for which I argue in this dissertation, but as it happens, some turn out to be held in common with Anne-Marie Bowery, “Responding to Socrates’ Pedagogical Provocation,” *The Proceedings of the 20th World Congress of Philosophy: The Paideia Archive*, 1998, written by Schultz herself.

Alcibiades could certainly benefit by this lesson, but he hasn't arrived yet.³⁰ Agathon may benefit by it, perhaps through taking the inherent poverty of *eros* more seriously, but, high on public victory and flirtation with Socrates, Agathon does not seem to require a lesson in Love's inexhaustible brio at this time. Young Phaedrus may benefit by this message one day, but for the moment he seems too insulated by the very young person's naïve confidence that good behavior and the prescribed forms of social education will equip him to deal with whatever life metes out. For all that Phaedrus considers shame to be one of the god of Love's greatest gifts to man, he doesn't seem particularly sensible to shame. And Apollodorus could benefit by it, perhaps, but he and Socrates haven't even met yet.

Aristodemus, the resource-denier, who wanted to be special to Socrates, is the known party guest whose character most seems to call for this specific reminder that, despite inherent poverty, Love can be dogged, dynamic, and, especially, creative in its ascendant pursuit of what it is missing. Socrates may not be ignoring Aristodemus' plight at all. But rather than giving Aristodemus exactly what he wanted, Socrates has perhaps tried to give Aristodemus what would set him *free* from a sense of self-worth that is falsely dependent on adjacency to Socrates--to excite Aristodemus to greater awareness and appreciation of his own philosophical resource.

I think it is very possible that Socrates has, in fact, tailored his speech for the sake of the vanishing symposiast, the character so unimportant that many commentators neglect to mention he's even there. And, unfortunately, Aristodemus has learned to repeat

³⁰ Though, as Anne-Marie Schultz astutely points out, Alcibiades may already have had the lesson or some version of it many times in his long, turbulent history with Socrates.

Socrates' lesson in preparation for philosophy without, it seems, truly receiving that lesson or recognizing how he specifically stands to benefit by it.

It makes sense to say that wherever Plato has depicted Socrates going about the philosophical life, we find a *possible* picture of preparedness for philosophy.³¹ In fact, one way of thinking about the tensions and (occasionally bizarre) contrasts we see between Socrates and his interlocutors is to interpret Socrates' attitudes and behaviors as posing an ever-present question of possibility: Socrates responds to his milieu in a highly eccentric way. He does not often appear to value what others value, and when he claims that he does, he so often seems to be teasing. At times, Socrates doesn't seem to suffer from the ordinary human susceptibilities.³²

Perhaps above all, whenever we are confronted with Socrates, we also confront our own skepticism about his apparently boundless idealism: Socrates is publicly dismantling the epistemic confidence and, sometimes, the livelihood and reputation of his interlocutors. Can his love of truth really be so undiluted that he does so only with the thought of mutual benefit for souls, with little to no thought of simple one-upmanship? Socrates is resigning himself to death in preference to abandoning philosophy. Can his love of truth really be so undiluted that he does so only for the sake of piety and duty and justice and love, with no thought of simple melodrama?

The troubled characters of the *Symposium* raise this question of Socratic possibility, as well. Socrates is denying his companions the opportunity to possess his

³¹ This observation I owe specifically to conversation with Anne-Marie Schultz.

³² In the *Symposium*, these include drunkenness, sleep, fear, and cold. We might also see Socrates' welcoming refutation as a special failure of susceptibility, if we were to agree that everyone but Socrates greets refutation with emotional pain.

“wisdom” through possessing him. He is denying them special status, special proximity, special acknowledgment, special access. He is shutting them down. Can he really be doing so from a place of friendship and kindness, rather than from troubling disaffection or insensibility? Or of stubborn unwillingness to share friendship unless, for example, Socrates can be the one to make the rules? (First rule: ‘gestures of friendship to be offered and acknowledged through elenctic dialogue only, Alcibiades’?) Is Socrates demonstrating for these friends a plausible alternative way? Is a sincere Socrates, in short, a possible creature, and could Socrates’ disappointed friends really become like him? Dialogues like the *Symposium* that offer a glimpse at a proto-Socrates (in this case a glimpse curated by Socrates, himself), can be understood as calling attention to the Socratic claim of possibility: ‘It is possible to be Socrates. It is possible to *become* Socrates. I can show you how I became Socrates.’

Or more precisely: It is possible to be a lover of wisdom. It is possible to become a lover of wisdom. I can show you how I became a lover of wisdom (and how I persist, despite the essential poverty of the position, in my love of wisdom).

Here is one further argument that the *Symposium* is a particularly good text to look to for ideas about Socrates’ preparation to be a philosopher: As Agathon begins his *encomium* to Love, he makes an argument that prior to praising Love for what it *does* for us, we must consider what properties of Love enable it to give those gifts. It is a version of the thesis that the properties of effects imply the properties of their causes. Love can only give to humans good gifts that reflect and derive from Love’s own specific good qualities (*Symposium* 195a). Thus, we should ask what properties Love has, and in doing so we will learn what Love is able to give us. Socrates affirms this general pattern of

reasoning, but he objects to the properties that Agathon has ascribed to Love (*Symposium* 199c-d). Love is not beautiful and young and happy; rather it is synonymous with desiring, and desiring implies both poverty and resource in one. Thus, we may reason, whatever Love, as a “mediating spirit,” gives, the gift will also be imperfect, a product of “middleness” and in between poverty and resource.

Socrates’ own speech and Alcibiades’ later substitution of an *encomium* to Socrates for the agreed-upon *encomium* to Love, suggest identification between Love and Socrates. And one appropriate response to this posited identification, it seems to me, would be to reexamine any claims and questions that the symposiasts have made about Love, with Socrates as their alternate subject.

Agathon pointed out an error that was made by his fellow symposiasts: they dwelt on what Love gives to human beings and neglected to ask what qualities of Love enable him to offer these gifts. Perhaps we should analyze the fixation on Socrates that is manifested by Apollodorus, Aristodemus, Alcibiades, and possibly Agathon himself, by proposing that these characters have all made a similar error with regard to Socrates himself: they have fixated on what Socrates has to give or to withhold (for example, that one might absorb Socrates’ wisdom sexually/osmotically, through closeness with him, or that one might achieve value through adjacency to him, or even that Socrates conceals secret virtues and gnostic wisdom inside himself like a statue of Silenus). But they have neglected to ask what qualities of Socrates ground their faith that Socrates has these gifts to give them. By misapprehending Socrates’ identity--his properties, especially as one, like Love himself, who is between wisdom and ignorance--these friends wait on Socrates to give them gifts he does not have to give, and miss out on the insight that the good

properties Socrates *does* have, such as his qualitative knowledge of living the philosophical life, are qualities they might come to share.

CHAPTER FIVE

Philosophical Preparedness and Socratic Origin Stories: Additional Dialogues

When Plato's *Symposium* is read therapeutically, both the origin story that Diotima tells about *Eros* and the origin story that Socrates tells about himself become opportunities for Socrates' auditors to reflect on the philosophic condition, which, according to Socrates' lesson, necessitates coexistence with poverty and resource, wisdom and ignorance. The obstructive shame of Apollodorus and Aristodemus, the *Symposium*'s narrators, figures one way that aspiring philosophers might come to require such a therapy. Aristodemus' preoccupation with his own poverty has made him a resource-denier who effaces any philosophical participation of his own. Apollodorus' fear of poverty and preoccupation with demonstrating pure resource has steered him into a false idea about what preparedness for philosophy should look like. Making an intervention on his friends' behalf, the Socrates of the *Symposium* tries to show the symposiasts how it was possible for him to pass from a state of ignorance about the philosophic condition to a state of acceptance and striving, in-between poverty and resource.

Other Platonic dialogues may not specifically mention the theme of preparation for philosophy, but they dramatize Socrates working to cultivate it. Arguably, if Socrates is imitable, then *any* dialogue where Socrates models techniques that are helping him to coexist with the suspension between poverty and resource can be read as intended to point his interlocutor, and Plato's readers, to greater preparation for philosophy. This

description admits many Platonic dialogues as potential sources.¹ In this particular chapter, however, I focus on developing some Socratic lessons about preparation for philosophy, using dialogues with one or both of the following characteristics: 1) they show Socrates intervening on behalf of an interlocutor or interlocutor(s) with the aim of enhancing that person's preparation for philosophy, and/or 2) they feature at least one Socratic origin story--a story told by Socrates that explains something about how Socrates himself became prepared to live the philosophical life. The four dialogues I've chosen are the *Lysis*, the *Protagoras*, the *Apology*, and the *Phaedo*.

Plato's *Lysis*² and *Protagoras*³ are both examples of dialogues in which Socrates intervenes on behalf of a young person in need of wisdom, modeling for the youth(s) something he's learned about the philosophical way of life. Yet the two differ dramatically in tone. In each case, a boy runs the risk of being inculcated with some false notion(s), and Socrates acts protectively on the boy's behalf. The *Lysis*, however, is a warm, intimate, and leisurely dialogue, while the *Protagoras* is confrontational and fraught. In the *Lysis*, Socrates "woos" young persons to philosophy, whereas in the

¹ Alexander Pruss has rightly pointed out that the emphasis on education for souls within the *Republic* makes it another particularly good choice for exploring preparation for philosophy. The dialogue's more pronounced political aspects simply make it fall out of step with the pattern of resemblances I've elected to explore in this particular chapter, however. The project has artificially-imposed limits, and the persistence in emphasis on origin stories and guidance for friends and young people happens to be one of them.

² Throughout the dissertation, I appeal to: Plato, *Lysis*, trans. Stanley Lombardo, in *Plato. Complete Works*, ed. J. Cooper, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 687-707.

³ Throughout the dissertation, I appeal to: Plato, *Protagoras*, trans. Stanley Lombardo and Karen Bell, in *Plato. Complete Works*, ed. J. Cooper, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 746-790.

Protagoras, Socrates goes to war against philosophy's spurious imitator, sophistry, on a younger person's behalf.

If the *Symposium* is a dialogue that shows Socrates attempting to offer a therapy which could help his friends (perhaps especially Aristodemus, who although oddly silent, is present for the lesson and who seems to need it) to overcome obstructive shame and cope with the philosophic condition, then the *Lysis* is a dialogue in which Socrates anticipates potential formative disasters that could be waiting to spoil or mislead two young and promising boys, as well as future challenges their spirits will likely confront, if they are brought into conversation with philosophy. It is not easy to be like *Eros*, who pursues the truth but loses his grip on it, and whose spirit often dies away and must summon the courage to come back again. It will be dangerous for the boys of the *Lysis* to live without philosophy--without any tools by which to test those who will promise to teach them and to make them good--but it will also sometimes be difficult for them to live with it. In the *Lysis*, Socrates tries to capitalize on youth's fleeting enthusiasm for conversation and questioning in a way that will mature the cooperative and curious spirit of the two young boys into a more thorough preparation for philosophy. The *Lysis* also features a very brief Socratic origin story.

The *Protagoras* also resembles the *Symposium* by showing Socrates' attempted intervention on behalf of a friend. Whereas the enthusiasm of the young boys in the *Lysis* mimics preparation for philosophy in a way that empowers Socrates to introduce them to new ideas and problem solving methods, the enthusiasm of Socrates' young friend, Hippocrates, from the *Protagoras*, is so diffuse and unguarded as to *endanger* him. Socrates tries to add to Hippocrates' preparation for philosophy by urging him vigilantly

to come to the defense of his own soul--before Hippocrates can make the mistake of taking for granted that instruction, regardless of its source, will be to his soul's benefit. As for that source of instruction, the Socrates of the *Protagoras* tries to further defend Hippocrates and the other characters (including *Symposium* characters) who come to listen to Protagoras the sophist, by setting out to undermine Protagoras before a large public audience. It seems implicit to the dramatic situation of the *Protagoras* that, in this instance, Socrates is unusually and openly confident Protagoras has no authentic knowledge by which to benefit that audience.⁴

The conceptual contents of the ensuing exchange between Socrates and Protagoras involve the claim that wisdom is required for courage, since courage is really a kind of right-seeing or "measurement" that correctly assesses whether something constitutes a serious threat to the person. If this discussion is read with the *Symposium* in mind, however, an interesting and significant problem for philosophers emerges. It is the nature of the philosophic condition to endure suspension *between* wisdom and ignorance. If philosophers cannot properly be said to possess wisdom, then the *Protagoras* would suggest that they cannot be courageous, either. And yet it is the spirit and resiliency of *Eros* that permits him always rejoin the pursuit of wisdom and beauty, despite "always living with Need". It seems as though a philosopher will require some manner of substitute for courage that can motivate her to run toward what seems threatening (perhaps painfully shame-inducing, for example) without the full flower of wisdom to reliably make clear to the spirit what *really* matters and what does not.

⁴ Socrates does not approach this particular encounter very provisionally!

The *Apology*⁵ and *Phaedo*,⁶ meanwhile, are two dialogues depicting events near the end of Socrates' life. The *Apology* resembles the *Symposium* in that it includes fragmentary Socratic origin stories. The Socratic origin stories of the *Apology* hint at ways Socratic methods emerged as *coping mechanisms* in the face of Socrates' growing awareness of his own and Athenian civic poverty. The Socrates of the *Apology* describes how he learned to be the truth-seeker that the Athenians have now put on trial. This Socrates seems doubtful that his auditors, an Athenian jury, will accept any guidance toward or preparation for philosophy. Still, the likelihood of Socrates' approaching sentence of death adds urgency to Socrates' rhetorical situation. If the Socrates of the *Apology* is to overcome the total failure of philosophical kinship between himself and his city and teach his fellow Athenians to cope with their suspension between wisdom and ignorance, it must be done now, before it is too late.

By contrast with the *Apology*, the *Phaedo* dramatizes Socrates' relationship with those who know and understand him best, on the day of his execution. If the *Apology* showed that Socratic methods emerged as coping mechanisms for dealing with poverty, then the *Phaedo* demonstrates how philosophical kinship and the increase of philosophic preparedness amongst Socrates' closest friends encourage Socrates to relax his methods and adapt the "investigations" that he has practiced for so long to suit a company of somewhat more skilled and more willing interlocutors. The philosophic preparedness of

⁵ Throughout the dissertation, I appeal to: Plato, *Apology*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, in *Plato. Complete Works*, ed. J. Cooper, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 17-36.

⁶ Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, in *Plato. Complete Works*, ed. J. Cooper, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 49-100.

the *Phaedo* interlocutors, though it may be imperfect, paves the way for a new message about preparation: that philosophy is itself the soul's preparation for dying and death.

Socrates Makes Introductions: Kinship and First Acquaintance in the Lysis

Since the *Lysis* is a dialogue Socrates narrates in the first person, it is Socrates himself who informs Plato's reader that the events of the dialogue are a digression. The *Lysis* discussion will take place only because Socrates turns aside from a stated intention to travel "from the Academy straight to the Lyceum," upon making a surprise encounter with two young friends, Hippothales and Ctesippus (*Lysis* 203). These young men urge Socrates to depart from his plans and come and join them within their handsomely and youthfully populated wrestling school (*Lysis* 203-204a). The school is new and built right against the city wall. It may even qualify as hidden, to some extent, since Socrates doesn't know that it's there prior to being ushered in by the two youths (*Lysis* 204a). Socrates leaves behind his established plans, and enters into an exceptional dramatic situation. Two younger pupils of the wrestling school, Lysis and Menexenus, will make for impressionable and spirited young interlocutors, and their youthful curiosity to speak with Socrates will allow him to act as a kind of guide and chaperone for them, bringing them into conversation with philosophy by way of an unusually gentle and amiable dialectical exchange.

The wrestling school with its hidden aperture, built so close to the city wall, suggests that this dialogue's events will take place in a kind of metaphorical borderland. Certainly, one border that shapes the dialogue is that between childhood and young adulthood. There is something special about the setting of the *Lysis*, as if the students in

the wrestling school are not just physically secluded, but still, for the moment, secluded in innocence by their youth.

The wrestling school also makes for an interesting setting because of its symbolic relation to what I have called the climate of *agonistic* expectation. Wrestling is literally an *agon*, a physical contest. In Chapter Two of my dissertation, I claimed that the *Gorgias* places Socrates' collaborative understanding of refutation--a view of the dialectic wherein it makes sense to *call for* refutation, because to reveal an error is a gift and creates mutual benefit for all, rather than victory for one and defeat for another--against a backdrop of Gorgias' own probably-unreflective *agonistic* view of refutation. As Socrates comes inside the wrestling school, the *Lysis* depicts the students in conversation, alongside ritual worship, alongside competition,⁷ in a single scene, as if to remind the reader of the mixture of competing social influences and pressures that will increasingly bear on these youths and boys as they grow into manhood within Athenian society.

Having agreed to enter the school with Hippothales and Ctesippus, Socrates casually chats with the young men until a matter of some comic urgency takes precedence. Ctesippus complains about Hippothales' recent treatment of the beautiful boy Lysis. Hippothales wants to woo the boy, and has gone about accomplishing this project through embarrassing, often-public exhibitions of poetry, prose, and singing in praise of Lysis and his notable family history. Socrates says of his friend Hippothales: "you deserve to be ridiculed" (*Lysis* 205d).

⁷ No students are mentioned wrestling, but several are competing in games with knucklebones.

At first, Socrates discusses Hippothales' offense primarily as a matter of strategy: Hippothales is failing at what he set out to do. If Hippothales artificially inflates a boy's self-estimation and comes across, in doing so, as though he is prematurely congratulating himself on the excellence of a future alliance between them, he risks the maximum humiliation, by reducing the likelihood that the boy wants to be around him in the first place, while setting himself up for a harder fall when his suit is rejected (*Lysis* 205e-206b). But the dialogue makes clear that bringing an end to the public self-destruction of Hippothales' dignity is far from Socrates' chief concern. Socrates wants to demonstrate to Hippothales how an older person should talk to a young boy like Lysis (and his best friend Menexenus), not just because Hippothales needs lessons in striking up an interesting and reciprocal conversation, but because Lysis and Menexenus themselves need to be trained to seek out and recognize the kinds of interesting and reciprocal conversation that will be to their benefit and credit as young adults. If Lysis is as beautiful and well-bred as Socrates and Hippothales agree he is, then many Athenians will be likely to desire his company, and few if any of them will know how to educate him or take care for the state of his soul. Socrates wants to intervene on the young boys' behalf, bringing them into conversation with philosophy, as a means of equipping them to protect themselves from a steady diet of flattery and the expectation that they will suffer fools.

If Socrates is sincere and any judge, then Lysis has many promising qualities. During the course of the dialogue, he will be described as "spirited and noble" (*Lysis* 205a) and "not only a beautiful boy but a well-bred young gentleman" (*Lysis* 207a). Perhaps above all, Lysis exhibits promising receptivity; Hippothales promises, "He really

likes to listen” (*Lysis* 206d). Lysis and Menexenus are a little shy but do not require much courage to join a philosophical conversation; their symptoms of shame are few and mild. Not yet expected to act like adults, they evade many of an adult’s false expectations (while remaining susceptible to the false notions and underinvestigated assumptions of youths). Although they bear reminding,⁸ these boys *know* from the experience of being children that they are in between wisdom and ignorance. The eagerness and shyness of the boys in the wrestling school are like the courage or the shame of an adult interlocutor, only writ very small.

Because the young boys of the *Lysis* are so willing to converse about philosophy with Socrates, we might think that Socrates has very little to add to the boys’ existing preparation for philosophy. Lysis and Menexenus are having fun, so they willingly persist in the conversation as long as their chaperones will allow. And surely persistence in the conversation is one of the simplest and most necessary hallmarks of preparation for philosophy. When the way forward is at its most unclear, if one has method and a modicum of spirit, one can always persist in the conversation, in the hope that a new philosophic aperture will eventually show itself.

But this conclusion, like the boys’ characters, would be premature. Youth and relative innocence have outfitted Lysis and Menexenus with prototypical but ultimately immature versions of qualities that *could* be the start of their preparation for philosophy (and which mimic it, in the immediate, well enough that Socrates can capitalize on them

⁸ And according to Scott’s chastening and arousal model of Socratic pedagogy, Socrates begins precisely by reminding them. Gary Alan Scott, *Plato’s Socrates as Educator* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000).

to enrich the discussion). But Socrates understands that these qualities will need to be tested and matured, or the boys will become distracted and lose hope or interest.

For one, Lysis and Menexenus already have an easy, if competitive, youthful association, an association which they seem more than happy to extend to Socrates for the duration of a novel and interesting conversation. Socrates capitalizes on the boys' rapport (and shows that he's neatly able to predict their competitive little disagreements) while introducing the boys to conceptual problems surrounding friendship (*Lysis* 207b-d). Because of their companionship, having a friend is likely to be something the boys consider very simple and easy to understand. This uncomplicated rapport between the boys is juxtaposed, however, against the very small but poignant Socratic origin story to be found in this dialogue. Socrates tells the boys,

Ever since I was a boy there's a certain thing I've always wanted to possess. You know how it is, everybody is different: one person wants to own horses, another dogs, another wants money, and another fame. Well, I'm pretty lukewarm about those things, but when it comes to having friends I'm absolutely passionate, and I would rather have a good friend than the best quail or gamecock known to man, and, I swear by Zeus above, more than any horse or dog. There's no doubt in my mind, by the Dog, that I would rather possess a friend than all Darius' gold, or even than Darius himself. That's how much I value friends and companions. And that's why, when I see you and Lysis together, I'm really amazed; I think it's wonderful that you two have been able to acquire this possession so quickly and easily while you're still young. Because you have in fact, each of you, gotten the other as a true friend--and quickly too. And here I am, so far from having this possession that I don't even know how one person becomes the friend of another, which is exactly what I want to question you about, since you have experience of it (*Lysis* 211d-212b).

This Socratic origin story expresses Socrates' loneliness and poverty. Socrates has often had to make do without the resource of philosophical kinship. But in the interests of enhancing Lysis and Menexenus' preparation for philosophy, Socrates will transform his story of poverty into potential resource for them, in a few ways: First, Socrates models

for the boys how topics which seem simple and easy to understand at the outset can open up into complex and rewarding puzzles. His explanation that, autobiographically, despite wanting a true friend so badly, Socrates doesn't know enough about how to get one, adds real stakes to the conceptual discussion that is about to follow. Socrates is motivated to understand friendship not merely academically, but in the hope that he can learn how to create or summon friendship. Apparently-simple matters of life can become complex philosophical problems, and apparently-complex matters of philosophy can bear on the simple things of everyday life.

Second, without dismantling the relationship of youthful proximity that the boys have already, easily, achieved, Socrates can challenge them to joint investigations that might mature their friendship, by partnership in truth seeking, into shared philosophical kinship. Lysis and Menexenus may easily grow apart as they get older, and the simplicity of their companionship may lapse. But training in mutually-stimulating, shared activities like rewarding conversation could become the kind of experience that shores up and enriches their bond.

Third, Socrates shows how highly he prizes true friendship, an expression of values that may inspire the boys to aspire to true friendship and be selective in their company. Although he does not do so elaborately in this instance, Socrates is testifying to the value of true friendship as a love object; he is pointing the boys' vision toward a good that, with a little reflection, they may discover they have only realized in part, and at the fuller expression of which they can aim their spirits.

Socrates' conversation with the boys is a real philosophical discussion in its own right, moderated at a level of discourse appropriate to the boys' age and experience. But

it also functions as a series of Socratic performances, prefiguring the kinds of philosophic difficulties (and joys) the boys are likely to encounter if they go on to pursue philosophy autonomously, with an almost-comic rapidity. (The speed of the dialogue's twists and turns certainly shows Socratic zest). In the *Eros* myth of the *Symposium*, Love, the paradigm of philosophic preparation, often dies away but is ultimately able to spring back up to life again, by virtue of his mingled parentage. Preparation for philosophy should include preparation to renew the spirit in the face of an *aporetic* crisis. Socrates actually seems to take care to steer the conversation into successive joys and difficulties, in all likelihood so the boys can experience what it is like to extricate themselves, both from *aporetic* impasse and from premature satisfaction with the results of the inquiry.

For example, at one point, Socrates and the boys have become somewhat mired in a seemingly repetitive and difficult to follow line of questioning concerning who loves whom and who hates whom, in relationships (*Lysis* 212-213). "Do you think, Menexenus," Socrates asks, putting the authority to decide the next step in the young boy's hands, "that we may have been going about our inquiry in entirely the wrong way?" (*Lysis* 213d-e). When Lysis eagerly ventures that they have, Socrates charmingly acts as though it was Lysis' point in the first place, and, directing the boys with navigation metaphors, demonstrates for them how to backtrack to an earlier point in the discussion and begin again (*Lysis* 213d-214a). This time, they will choose a new resource to motivate their discussion, the inherited wisdom of the poets.⁹

⁹ In this moment, Socrates is conferring on the boys a gift, in that he models for them a response to an impasse in the conversation, but the boys are also giving Socrates a kind of gift: how often does an adult interlocutor permit Socrates to backtrack and adopt a new method? This might be a technique we would see from Socrates more often, if he had such cooperative conversation partners more often.

Socrates then asks the boys their opinion on this inherited knowledge: is it true? When the boys respond that they believe it, Socrates speculates that “maybe half of it [is true]... maybe even all of it, but we don’t *understand* it” (*Lysis* 214c, emphasis mine). This observation refocuses the group’s shared response to the resource under consideration and teaches the boys to look for instances when affirming knowledge and understanding it come apart.

Perhaps the single most dramatic moment of the dialogue occurs at 218c, when the discussion has been going well and has reached a tentative conclusion. Socrates the first-person narrator comes to the fore and informs Plato’s reader that

I was pretty happy myself. I had the satisfied feeling of a successful hunter and was basking in it, when a very strange suspicion, from where I don’t know, came over me. Maybe what we had all agreed to wasn’t true after all. What an awful thought. ‘Oh no!’ I screamed out. ‘Lysis and Menexenus,’ our wealth has all been a dream!’

Were it not for the incursion of Socrates as narrator, this exaggerated and delightful performance of *aporia* for the boys’ benefit would merely be in keeping with the pattern of pivots and reverses Socrates has executed throughout the dialogue. But this time, the performance seems to take place *as if within Socrates’ own internal monologue*, as well. The Socrates of the *Lysis*’ dramatic action has performed *aporia* for the boys, but the Socrates of the *Lysis*’ narrative frame has performed *aporia* for Plato’s audience.

During the course of the *Lysis* discussion, Socrates also makes introductions. To Lysis and Menexenus he brings topics of particular significance and philosophical bearing--such as happiness, wisdom, and the good. Without these chaperoned introductions, it might not readily occur to the boys that these higher ideals figure into discussions about matters like friendship, which for them are the stuff of the everyday.

Poignantly, when Socrates introduces the boys to the Beautiful, it is literally as “a *friend*” (*Lysis* 216c-d).

Socrates guides the discussion with more than usually firm leadership, not because his interlocutors are uncooperative but precisely because they are inexperienced and appear so willing to be led. Ultimately, though, Socrates wants to enhance their preparation for philosophy by transferring authority for the discussion over to the boys themselves. When Lysis, who really likes to listen, shyly asks Socrates to repeat again for Menexenus the discourse they just proceeded through and which Menexenus missed, Socrates answers him, “Why don’t you tell him yourself, Lysis? You gave it your complete attention” (*Lysis* 211a).

Courage in the Absence of Wisdom: the Protagoras

The dramatic situation of the *Protagoras* explores philosophical preparedness primarily through the relationship between Socrates and a younger friend, Hippocrates. Hippocrates shows great enthusiasm for the possibilities of his own education and would like to become a “man of respect” within Athens (*Protagoras* 316c).¹⁰ Hippocrates actually rouses Socrates in the early hours of the morning on the presumption that the two will go together to hear Protagoras, a renowned visiting sophist and teacher for hire. Hippocrates believes Protagoras is just the sort of person to teach him what he wants to know, and he seems to take for granted that Socrates will share his optimism.

Socrates, however, prefers to subject Hippocrates to some examination first, to learn what precautions Hippocrates is taking before trusting the formation of his soul to

¹⁰ These words actually come from Socrates’ summation of Hippocrates’ stated wishes, but Hippocrates affirms them.

Protagoras. As Socrates (who, here again, narrates the dialogue in the first person) remarks explicitly, “I wanted to see what Hippocrates was made of...” (*Protagoras* 311b). Socrates learns that at least some of Hippocrates’ noticeable boldness and eagerness where his education is concerned derive from ignorance about the inherent *risk* of putting himself under another person’s tutelage. Already it is evident that Hippocrates lacks some preparation for philosophy.

And it is with Hippocrates’ unpreparedness in mind that the remainder of the dialogue, in which Socrates attempts publicly to undermine Protagoras (and the other sophists present), unfolds. Socrates is working to stir Hippocrates--and any others like him among their onlookers--to a kind of philosophical self-defense. Preparation for philosophy includes preparation to come to the defense of your own soul.

Plato’s *Protagoras* invites comparison with the *Symposium* by, for one, featuring cameo appearances from the majority of the symposiasts, albeit as members of an unusually sizeable named cast. Eryximachus and Phaedrus, Pausanias and Agathon--in pairs, no less--are specified as in attendance at Callias’ house and witness Socrates and Protagoras cross-examining one another. Perhaps even more significantly, when Socrates and Protagoras disagree about speaking styles and the conversation threatens to break down altogether, Alcibiades, also present in the *Protagoras*, pleases Socrates very much by coming to Socrates’ aid. Alcibiades intervenes succinctly and respectfully, exhibiting such candor, good sense, equanimity, and potential for leadership, that the wild insobriety and unresolved pain of the later Alcibiades we meet in the *Symposium* is thrown into even sharper relief by the comparison. One seldom encounters an interlocutor in Plato who speaks so well and receives so much credit within the dialogue.

In addition to the way it reveals Socrates in the act of trying to add to a young friend's preparation for philosophy, the *Protagoras* contributes to the understanding of preparedness by posing a useful framing question. The *Protagoras* juxtaposes Hippocrates' eagerness for a teacher with a later argument between Socrates and Protagoras himself about the unity of the virtues. During this argument, Socrates firmly maintains that true courage is dependent on wisdom and can't exist apart from it, while Protagoras argues that there are examples of very courageous people who are also unwise. Within the context of their disagreement, Protagoras and Socrates treat the topic of courage as mostly academic, but the wider dramatic situation, in which young Hippocrates risks being led astray by boldly rushing headlong into the tutelage of an unexamined teacher while Socrates tries to teach him to respect the inherent riskiness of formative education, reminds Plato's audience to take seriously the very relevant difficulties that arise in the interaction between ignorance and spirit.

Socrates makes a good case that courage depends on possessing wisdom. He argues that the courageous person runs toward danger willingly because he can correctly estimate the *genuine* degree of risk posed to him by any particular threat. The truly courageous person sensibly avoids what would harm her soul, because she recognizes that harm to the soul is a great and serious evil. However, for a good enough reason, the courageous person is willing to run toward what might threaten her body, her worldly goods, or her social standing, because she estimates the potential good to be done as greater than the illusory potential harm to herself. Socrates calls this skill at correctly estimating values "measurement." Socrates likens this kind of wisdom to depth

perception or visual perspective. The unwise person can't tell which dangers are far away versus which are really close up; the wise person can.

Protagoras himself is experiencing what it is like to have his career come under public attack by Socrates, and is characterized as uncourageous, because he interprets the threat of damage to his reputation as authentic harm. Meanwhile, Hippocrates also lacks the virtue of courage, proper, because although he's bold, he still poorly estimates the risk he takes when he volunteers to put the education of his soul in the hands of a teacher who may be unworthy.

What Socrates and Protagoras do not come 'round to discussing is what to do about the need for courage when one is *in-between* wisdom and ignorance. When the *Protagoras* and the *Symposium* are brought into conversation, the problem that "measurement" poses for the philosopher takes on a new seriousness. *Eros*, who models philosophical thriving while suspended between *poros* and *penia*, is a highly spirited character. Although he's hardly unassailable, he is "brave, impetuous, and intense" (*Symposium* 203d). *Eros* is always pressing on, seeking an aperture, a way-forward. If *Eros*--or one of his human analogues, a lover--must confront something frightening, or discouraging, or dreadful, and yet do so without possessing wisdom, how is such a person to marshal his strength and "run toward" what he dreads?

Several of the *Symposium*'s characters are not flourishing in the philosophical life. As I've argued earlier in this dissertation, I believe that is because they are preoccupied with and obstructed by shame. It stands to reason that these *Symposium* characters are poorly estimating the real power of misplaced shame (or of the poverty that inspires it) to deal them any real harm. The knowledge of their own poverty looms over them, as if

distractingly close-up. But this threat is in fact, much “further away” than they are able to recognize. Socrates would like to add to their preparation for philosophy by helping them to acknowledge and accept the frailty of the philosophic condition. It stands to reason that he would like to add to their courage. But if courage requires wisdom and the philosopher is not wise, then where is philosophic courage to come from? Surely the philosopher requires some prototypical virtue, in-between poverty and resource, or in order to be sufficiently prepared for the philosophical life?

I would like to suggest that the *Symposium* (and the *Gorgias*) show how Socrates could respond to this particular problem of philosophic preparedness. According to Diotima’s account of the *erotic* ascent in the *Symposium*, the desire that one human being feels for the beautiful body of another human being can become an aperture by which the lover may transcend love of merely physical beauty, exciting love for the beauty of souls and laws and concepts and, ultimately, love for undiluted Beauty and The Good itself.

Alexander Nehamas further interprets the *erotic* ascent as one in which the power of love prompts a desire to *understand* and transcend. As the lover discovers and is overcome by each new type of beauty, she can’t help but want to *understand* the object of her profound desire. Love’s power to propel the lover to seek understanding explains, for Nehamas, how the *erotic* ascent moves from stage to stage. Furthermore, Nehamas argues, loving implies a willingness to be changed and redefined by the beloved. Submitting to a love of beauty and truth should not only prompt me to pursue beauty and truth as prized ideals, but to accept the inevitability that my love will change me.¹¹

¹¹ Alexander, Nehamas. “‘Only in the Contemplation of Beauty Is Human Life Worth Living’ Plato, ‘Symposium’ 211D.” *European Journal of Philosophy* 15, no. 1 (2007): 1-18.

In Chapter Three of my dissertation, I examined a passage in the *Gorgias* in which Socrates compared and contrasted his love for Philosophy with Callicles' love for the Athenian *demos*. Because Socrates and Callicles are both in love, they have in common a helpless impulse always to be saying whatever their respective beloveds most love to hear. If Socrates is right about Callicles and himself, then love can either be protective and inspiring, or it can render the lover more unstable and vulnerable. Callicles' love for the *demos*, serves to dilate in his estimation the capricious approval and disapproval of the people, rendering Callicles susceptible to shame and fear of rejection. Socrates' love, by contrast, seems almost to have inoculated him against the pain of shame. Philosophy is steady, not capricious, and aims at the good. Love of her has seemed to protect Socrates, by equipping him with a facsimile, at least, of courage and perseverance; Socrates will press on in saying whatever philosophy would have him say, because she looms large in his sight; he loves Philosophy too much to be turned away from her. He can't *help* himself (*Gorgias* 481-482).

Thus, a possible, albeit innately imperfect, answer to the problem posed by the *Protagoras* could be that in the absence of wisdom, *love* itself must function as a kind of proto-measurement. Love dilates the importance of the love object; it is a way for things to look very close up. If the love of something beautiful and good fills up my vision, it will be harder for fear to loom there. Moreover, where love propels by means of a desire for understanding, as Nehamas argues, it continues to introduce new, close-up love objects, new encompassing beauties.

Preparation for Philosophy, Preparation for Death and Dying

Plato's *Apology* and *Phaedo* are both set very near the end of Socrates' life, the former at Socrates' trial and the latter on the day of his execution. Both dialogues include a Socratic origin story, and both provide some insight into preparedness for philosophy.

In the *Apology*, in an effort to convince his audience, the jury, that he practices philosophy in response to a divine mandate and on the dictates of his conscience, Socrates hints at how his methods and philosophical commitments evolved. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates takes advantage of the special measure of philosophical kinship he shares with some of his closest friends to enjoy a philosophical discussion secured, at least in part, by the cultivated philosophical preparedness of several of the interlocutors. On his last day, Socrates seeks to encourage his friends and to shore up their preparedness for philosophy with one last message before he leaves them.

Each of these two dialogues might be said to be tonally triumphant, in its own way. Perhaps the *Apology* does not depict a defense with any high rhetorical probability of tending to an acquittal, but it does depict a moment of radical, open self-affirmation from Socrates. Socrates looks back on the way his life of "investigation" into wisdom began--tentatively, he reports, but building to a virtually unassailable sense of philosophical vocation--and ultimately affirms the value of his service to his city while indicting the integrity of those citizens who have disingenuously put him on trial for it.

The *Phaedo*, on the other hand, shows Socrates' final striving: to face death with courage and good cheer and never to abandon the thread of his final conversation among friends, not even at those moments when the debate seems to favor conclusions, that, if true, would give Socrates good reason to feel afraid of his impending death. The Socrates

of the *Phaedo* is vulnerable and fond and emotionally generous with his friends, even though his determination to hold on to a “philosophic” attitude about his own death falls out of step with their mounting grief.

Thus, each of these two dialogues affirms something about Socrates’ life work: on the one hand, dutiful action in keeping with the mandate of his convictions, and on the other hand, the bringing-together of a small community within which he can be true to himself at the hour of death.

Yet from an alternate perspective, I think it would also be fair to characterize the *Apology*, at least, as an exploration of Socrates’ profoundest and most tragic failure: the deep gulf of misunderstanding between himself and his own city. The events of the *Apology* are occurring precisely because Socrates failed to find philosophical kinship within the *polis*. The Socratic origin stories that Socrates gives in the *Apology* seem to function as a last attempt on Socrates’ part to challenge the people of Athens to revalue his relationship with them. In these fragmentary origin stories, Socrates implies that the *elenchus* emerged as a kind of coping mechanism for dealing with the suspension between wisdom and ignorance, a way-forward when Socrates himself experienced *aporia* in the face of a difficult apparent contradiction. Yet, Socrates suggests, the Athenians badly misunderstood the aim and intent of the philosophical investigations in which he inevitably entangled them. Athens brings Socrates to trial, and that trial is the culmination of Socrates’ failure to help the Athenians prepare for philosophy.

By contrast, the *Phaedo* hints at what is possible among friends, in a context where philosophical kinship has been affectionately cultivated. If Socrates believes that the jurors he addressed in the *Apology* misunderstood him, then the *Phaedo* shows

Socrates interacting with those who likely understand him best, if nonetheless imperfectly. We might think of the *Phaedo* as depicting a kind of Socratic master class, where a shared eagerness to persist in the conversation is, in itself, a significant mark of much greater than usual preparation for philosophy. Within this special context, we see that Socrates is able (a) to relax the strictures of his philosophical methods and approach the conversation with greater freedom, trusting that his closest friends, whatever their flaws, share his love for the truth and will help him bring the conversation to fruition, as well as (b) to encourage an even more rigorous discipline, which Socrates calls “true philosophy.”

Philosophy as Coping Mechanism in the Apology

At his trial--and consequently near the end of his life--Socrates tells a story about how it was that he came to take up those specific philosophical habits that would eventually excite the very accusations being brought against him. In context, the immediate purpose of this origin story seems to be to make clear to his audience that, from the outset, Socrates defined philosophical examination of his fellow citizens as a matter of conscience, and that it became a matter of conscience because Socrates considered himself responsible to make sense of a divine revelation, which came to him from Apollo's Oracle at Delphi. Assuming the philosophical origin story that Socrates gives at his trial in the *Apology* should be read as an ingenuous personal history (rather than an ironical construction to mock or shame the audience), then it is a story of vocation and confidence emerging from Socrates' own deeply personal confrontation with *aporia*.

The Socrates of the *Apology* doesn't say anything about whether he considered himself a philosopher in the time before the story begins. That his friend Chaerephon

even thought to ask the Oracle at Delphi whether anyone was wiser than Socrates--the inciting incident of the origin story--suggests that Socrates already stood out somehow as a candidate for the superlative. (Or perhaps as a particularly poor candidate, if Chaerephon was having fun at his friend's expense).¹² But what the origin story makes clear is that, however unusual a young man Socrates was prior to the Oracle's answer, he was forced to evolve in order to become prepared for the implications of the philosophical life.

Socrates reports all of the following: that when he heard about the Oracle's answer, he considered it a "riddle" and did not have any immediate theory about how it could be true, that he reckoned from the outset that the god could not have *lied* about Socrates being wisest, for "it is not legitimate for him to do so," and that he "reluctantly" began examining Athenian citizens with a reputation for wisdom, because he also held on to a curious stated hope of discovering someone wiser than himself and then presenting that person to the Oracle as a counterexample and refutation. The tensions between these three remarks suggest that the present-day Socrates is not averse to mimicking the Oracle's fondness for a good riddle.

Accordingly, in what may have been the pilot episode of the Socratic-*elenchus*-as-a-way-forward, Socrates decided to press the matter. This choice touched off a kind of quest to come to terms with the Oracle's verdict. Socrates needed to reconcile his own firm impression that he possessed no special wisdom with his important concern that it "is not legitimate" for the god to lie. Although Socrates doesn't describe it in much detail,

¹² Perhaps Socrates was actually known for being a poor identifier of cast shadows, so to speak, a la the freed prisoner in the Allegory of the Cave, who had become accustomed to seeing in better light.

the “investigation” of fellow Athenians that Socrates initiated in response to the Oracle seems first to prefigure and ultimately to evolve into the Socratic methods that we see enacted across the Platonic dialogues. Moreover, Socrates’ language in the *Apology* suggests that his attitude toward and interpretation of the Oracle itself also evolved. An initial stated intention to produce a counterexample and confront the Oracle with that evidence gives way to a personal conviction that the “investigation” itself is a divinely-mandated responsibility imposed on Socrates, through his coming to understand the Oracle’s true intent.

Of course, famously, Socrates arrives at an explanation for the Oracle’s answer that made sense both of his own impression that he knows very little at all and of the Oracle’s answer that, all the same, no one is wiser than Socrates: Everyone in the city of Athens is ignorant, but Socrates at least *knows* he is. The “public men” of Athens require a sense of their own wisdom in order to hand down policy, so, accordingly, they do have a sense of their own wisdom--but not much to show for it. The skilled craftsmen have know-how, but they generalize their confidence from areas where they do have knowledge to areas where they don’t. The poets produce insight but can’t give an account of it; they don’t understand it and can’t explicate it.

According to the origin story, once Socrates is able to make sense of the Oracle, his “investigations” into the wisdom of fellow Athenians transform from a temporary spate of social experimentation into his new way of life. Presumably, this is because, for one, the young Socrates’ outlook on his city is now lonelier than before, and the stakes for finding someone wiser than, or even like-minded with, himself are now much higher.

Now Socrates will wake up to an Athens where he, of all people, possesses one piece of wisdom that no one else has and no one else wants.

As Socrates recounts his dawning awareness of this new life, we see that his early preparation for philosophy had poignant social dimensions. The first time that Socrates tells his audience “I realized, to my sorrow and alarm, that I was getting unpopular,” we might think, given the inveterate, ironical eccentric we’ve come to know, that Socrates is mocking his audience for a sensitivity to popular opinion that he does not actually share (*Symposium* 21e). But this theme of Socrates’ unlooked-for alienation emerges again in the speech: “As a result of this investigation, men of Athens, I acquired much unpopularity, of a kind that is hard to deal with and is a heavy burden” (*Symposium* 22e-23a). Additionally, Socrates reports beginning to be singled out and misunderstood, with a reputation for wisdom that doesn’t accord with his own discovery about what his “wisdom” really implies.

If we take this part of the story seriously, then to our gallery of impressions about who Plato’s Socrates is or was, we can add an unusual cameo from an ambivalent Socrates, one who seems to have thought that his place within his city would turn out to be something very different than it did, and who, upon concluding that he had a responsibility to the god, was forced to renegotiate his social expectations and identity.

One way of thinking about this origin story that Socrates gives at his trial is as a story of the young Socrates forced into a direct and not-wholly-anticipated confrontation with *penia*--poverty, deficit--his own and that of his community at large. The Oracle at Delphi had answered that no one was wiser than Socrates. It is easy to default to the assumption that when Socrates’ impertinent investigation into the “public men” of

Athens ultimately upheld the Oracle's claim, however surprised or unsurprised we should believe Socrates really felt at this result, Socrates attained a kind of victory. He became notable. He came out on-top--or at least on-par. Either Socrates is the wisest man in his city or, at the least, he is exceeded in wisdom by no one else.

Yet if we take *at all* seriously the requests Socrates repeats across so many of Plato's dialogues to be taught or to be corrected, then when Socrates' investigation bore out the Oracle's verdict, it must have been a pyrrhic victory at best. On the one hand, Socrates acted according to the dictates of his own conscience and found a way to reconcile his skepticism and incredulity with the divine decree. He found a way to make sense of the Oracle's claim, which required him to jettison neither the impressions of his own experience nor his confidence in the truthfulness of gods. We should remember, however, that in the process Socrates accidentally demonstrated how little the Athenian social institutions, which promised their young people access to wisdom, really had to offer. Socrates could find no counterexample to the Oracle's claim, but he could also find *no teacher*.

And according to the *Apology* origin story, Socrates also discovered new ways he could be misunderstood. Socrates acquired imitators (*Apology* 23d), spectators eager to witness others being questioned (*Apology* 23c), and a false reputation for wisdom out of keeping with what Socrates had come to believe about himself (*Apology* 20e). Moreover, although Socrates' "investigations" within the community forced him into the role of a kind of public figure, he reports he learned that he must find a way to be private, instead:

This is what prevented me from taking part in public affairs, and I think it was quite right to prevent me. Be sure, men of Athens, that if I had long ago attempted to take part in politics, I should have died long ago, and benefited neither you nor myself. Do not be angry with me for speaking

truth; no man will survive who genuinely opposes you or any other crowd and prevents the occurrence of many unjust and illegal happenings in the city. A man who really fights for justice must lead a private, not a public, life if he is to survive for even a short time (*Apology* 31d).

Likely, the Socratic origin story given in the *Apology* shows that one way Socrates became prepared for the philosophical life was by adopting a new rhetoric--one suited both to his keen awareness of his own ignorance and to his newly precarious social position. That unpopularity took the young Socrates in the story by surprise suggests that Socrates at one time believed, however naively, that he could navigate his “investigations” of others in a straightforward way that would be taken at face value. This young Socrates did not set out to alienate himself or to experience schadenfreude at others’ expense, and perhaps he imagined that his fellow citizens would find the exposure of their own ignorance on important matters to be useful and relevant information, if not exactly good news. When the straightforward and optimistic approach conclusively failed, and when coping with the philosophical life came to demand that Socrates somehow be both a public and a private man, it seems Socrates required a new way of using language that would excite fascination, protect him at the distance of ambiguity from those he engaged, and still honor the truth.

In an earlier chapter, I proposed the idea that Socratic irony sometimes functions as a kind of provisional truth-telling--a way to speak to the importance of Socrates’ highest values, and even to indict an interlocutor for failure to honor those same values, but to do so from the position of one in-between ignorance and wisdom, poverty and resource. If Socrates is wisest because he’s aware of his own ignorance, then presumably one of the things he knows he does not know is the state of other men’s souls. And yet, as he emphasizes in the *Apology*, Socrates has also taken on a sacred responsibility to sting

complacent, self-satisfied Athenians awake, particularly calling their attention to the state of their souls. The Athenians need a perfect diagnostician of the soul, but Socrates is the best man available to them. I suggest that Socrates has responded to this state of affairs by adopting an indefinite style of rhetoric that functions, provisionally, as an accusation of the soul, only if deserved.

If the Socrates of the *Apology* could find no teacher, and if he discovered that he required a new language that would allow him to be public and hidden at the same time, truthful and yet inscrutable, protected and yet isolated at the distance of ambiguity, then perhaps Socrates took the Oracle itself for his teacher¹³, in the face of Athenian civic poverty. It was, after all, the riddle of the Oracle that “taught” Socrates to respond to his bafflement with new methods of inquiry. Diotima, Socrates’ teacher of the *Symposium*, is portrayed communicating with Socrates relatively straight-forwardly. If Socrates learned to be ironic, then perhaps the *Apology* suggests that he learned it from the Oracle itself.

Interestingly, the *Apology* origin story does not go into much detail about how Socratic methods evolved from the time when Socrates began questioning: what kinds of questions Socrates asked and whether his approach altered over time. The Socrates of the *Apology* takes for granted that his audience is sufficiently familiar with his methods (whether from witnessing them, imitating them, or just hearing about them, however charitably or mendaciously they may have been described by differing sources) and so he doesn’t discuss method in any significant detail. We do, however, see Socrates interpret his “investigations,” their meaning, and their outcomes multivalently over the course of the speech. Each time Socrates restates the motivation for or purpose of his investigations,

¹³ Anne-Marie Schultz encouraged me to pursue the implications of the Oracle as a teacher of Socrates.

it comes out a little bit differently. There could be a number of reasons for this subtle but significant degree of variety in Socrates' language, and no one explanation is dictated by the context. For example, we might think that the variations are laid out chronologically, to tell a story about how Socrates' own mindset about his emerging vocation changed over time. Alternately, a trend toward increasing conviction each time Socrates revisits the topic of his investigations might reflect the rhetorical intensity that is building throughout the duration of the speech. (The Socrates of the *Apology* does tend to postpone making his firmest, most unequivocal statements about his vocation and his value to the city until the later parts of the speech, at which point he begins to own them unapologetically). In any case, I prefer to think, given Socrates' opening promise that his rhetoric will be characterized by candor and spontaneity throughout, that every version of Socrates' motive or intent is one he would consider a truthful version. Perhaps it is even the case that the young Socrates of the *Apology* origin story, even then, understood his investigations in many ways at once. Socrates reports his first reaction to the Oracle as *aporia*, at 21b-c: "Whatever does the god mean? What is his riddle? I am very conscious that I am not wise at all; what then does he mean by saying I am the wisest?" The intent to refute follows at 21d. Interestingly, however, at 23b, Socrates believes he has found his answer, but the investigations go forward: "So even now I continue this investigation as the god bade me--and I go around seeking out anyone, citizen or stranger, whom I think wise. Then if I do not think he is, I *come to the assistance of the* god and show him that he is not wise" (*Apology* 23b). Refutation--perhaps the most conventional understanding of Socrates' method, has transformed into vindication of the truth. The truth will withstand scrutiny. So subjection to scrutiny can have the effect of vindicating the truth.

The *Apology* tells a story of Socrates' fumbling invention in response to painful necessity, as well as of his isolation and loneliness. According to the way Socrates describes his philosophical origins in that dialogue, when philosophy imposed on him an obligation to investigate a proposition--and to vindicate or refute or otherwise come to terms with that proposition--his obedience to that calling unintentionally put him outside the life of easy civic kinship and political resource. Social institutions that had appeared to offer him an aperture--a *way-forward*--to the good life, either revealed themselves to be bankrupt or turned him away, or both. Unspecified Socratic methods emerged as coping mechanisms in the face of this disillusionment, loss of reliable authority, and failure of kinship. Socrates responded to his ignorance with ingenuity, but he lost the love of his city, and could not find philosophical friendship with its citizens.

Freedom and Resource within Kinship in the Phaedo

The *Phaedo*, bittersweet, opens with a consideration of the way pleasure and pain come in our experience. Phaedo, a thoughtful narrator who seems sincere, observant, emotionally moderate, and a genuine respecter of philosophy, remarks that his memories of Socrates' last days are both pleasant and painful at the same time (*Phaedo* 59b). Then, within the dramatic action but almost directly afterward, Phaedo recalls how Socrates, in prison awaiting execution, was freed from his restraints on the day that his jailers determined his execution would be taking place. Socrates admitted modestly that he had been in pain while restrained, but that the pain has been replaced with pleasure now that he had been freed. "What a strange thing that which men call pleasure seems to be, and how astonishing the relation it has with what is thought to be its opposite, namely pain! A man cannot have both at the same time!" (*Phaedo* 60b). It's an interesting and oddly

encouraging juxtaposition, as relates to Socrates, his young friends, and his legacy.

Phaedo knows when he makes his comment about the concurrent pleasures and pains of his own experience that he is about to tell the story in which Socrates will say nearly the opposite. He clearly remembers that Socrates said as much, too. But he reflects upon his own experience and characterizes it as he sees fit.

Of course, Phaedo's claim about pleasure and pain and Socrates' claim are not necessarily intended to contradict one another. Socrates' point is that opposite states replace one another, a premise which will figure importantly in some of the arguments to come. Phaedo's point is that one part of a person can be experiencing pleasure while another part is in pain. (Phaedo's joy and grief are not my warmth and hunger, but I can certainly be pleasantly warm while unpleasantly hungry at the same time). It's refreshing to see Phaedo giving off such subtle cues of self-direction, though. Especially since Phaedo, as a friend of Socrates, now embodies in his surviving person Socrates' efforts to inspire preparation for philosophy. Already, Phaedo provides an example of loyalty to Socrates' legacy that need not be slavish.¹⁴

One way that the *Phaedo* resembles each of the other three dialogues discussed in this chapter is that its dramatic situation introduces an element of urgency. In the *Lysis*, Socrates seems to feel the urgency of inducting young interlocutors into the practice of philosophy before they can uncritically fall prey to Athenian social institutions that would

¹⁴ Debra Nails notes that Phaedo of Elis was likely only about twenty years old at the time Socrates died, but he would go on to found his own philosophical school at Elis. So it's not unreasonable to think that Plato would like his readers to notice Phaedo's free-thinking and reflectivity. According to Nails, Diogenes wrote that Phaedo was a prisoner of war, "sold into slavery as a catamite, but redeemed, perhaps at Socrates' request of Crito." See Debra Nails, *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics*, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), 231. This unique story adds to the poignancy of Socrates' affection for the young Phaedo.

promise civic education and character formation but ultimately corrupt their souls with flattery and pride. Similarly, in the *Protagoras*, Socrates tries to slow a young friend down, calling Hippocrates to come to his own souls' defense before he can rashly commit himself to the influence of a perhaps-unworthy teacher. In the *Apology*, Socrates confronts a jury of members that he claims have been misinformed about him over a long period of time. Socrates may wonder whether these jurors, steeped in false impressions of his life's work, are already beyond the reach of philosophy, and if it is too late to significantly contribute to their preparation for it. However, if he has any remaining chance to convert their thinking, this public address is likely to be his last significant rhetorical opportunity.

Finally, taking place as it does after Socrates has been sentenced to death and on the day of his scheduled execution, the *Phaedo* represents Socrates' last chance to exhort friends and fellow philosophers to remain hopeful in the philosophical life. The dramatic situation is urgent in that it imposes a time limit on Socrates' lesson. After this time limit has elapsed, it will no longer be within Socrates' power to enhance or shore up his friends' preparation for philosophy or to enjoy with them the specific fruits of shared, cooperative philosophical engagement. Of course, a gentle irony of the *Phaedo* is that, from a certain point of view, the *Phaedo* interlocutors show more concern about this urgency than Socrates does himself. The interlocutors are experiencing heightened concern that Socrates' death will deduct something irreplaceable from their participation in the philosophical life. By contrast, though Socrates himself responds to urgency in this near-death dramatic situation when he invites the interlocutors to measure themselves against what he calls "*true* philosophy," and when he urges them against giving in to hatred of

reasonable discourse, Socrates also tries to downplay the specific sense of urgency that the interlocutors seem to be feeling most keenly. He encourages his friends to recognize and take pleasure in the goods that are instantiated within their community of discourse--goods which can persist and evolve after Socrates himself is gone.

The *Phaedo* also specially resembles the *Lysis*, in that in each dialogue, Socrates' methods show responsiveness to an exceptional dramatic situation that is created at least in part by the character of the interlocutors. Though Socrates can see that Lysis and Menexenus are immature and require additional preparation for philosophy, the young boys' natural curiosity, eagerness to be part of an interesting conversation, and youthful familiarity with the state of having much to learn are characteristics that seem to act as prototypical of philosophic preparedness. Preparation for philosophy is preparation to coexist with the philosopher's suspension between poverty and resource. A philosopher owns both and copes with both.

If the youth and inexperience of the *Lysis* interlocutors provided Socrates with an unusual opportunity to capitalize on their fresh curiosity and to carry a shared dialectical exchange through many phases, all the way to the concluding point of Socrates' choosing, then the greater maturity of the *Phaedo* interlocutors functions similarly and perhaps even more joyously. The view that the *Apology* shows Socratic methods adopted mainly as coping mechanisms in a landscape of civic poverty, isolation, and *aporia* is borne out by the relaxation of those methods that we witness among Socrates' friends. The *Phaedo* includes able and imaginative interlocutors who care as much about the inquiry as they very evidently do for Socrates himself--interlocutors such as Cebes, who is "always on the track of some arguments." Rather than vigorously pressing every line of questioning,

in the expectation of interlocutors who would prefer to evade the conversation and *quit*, Socrates so clearly trusts that his friends in the *Phaedo* will eventually persist with him in the conversation, that he actually proposes a digression--to the argument against misology.

There is a sense in which the *Phaedo* includes three origin stories, though only one is explicitly Socratic. The first origin story is the origin of the “True Philosopher.” The second origin story, by contrast, is the story of the misologue, a hater of reasonable discourse. Socrates introduces his argument against misology in terms that are, though not hypothetical, couched as observations about others. Socrates has sometimes observed a person who put his trust in an idea, only for it to disappoint him. And when it did, he transferred his confidence to another idea and another, but each subsequent position fell apart. Following the tendency of the misanthrope, whose trust in people has been violated too many times, the misologue comes to “hate reasonable discourse” after too many promising arguments have fallen through. Misology comes from a failure of preparation for philosophy.

Interestingly, it is only after the discussion of misology, more or less in the abstract, that Socrates mentions, by way of anecdote, how as a very young person his own views were highly changeable and unstable. Socrates’s story about his pre- and early philosophic youth becomes a story of his narrowly evading misology, and the origin story of the True Philosopher becomes the story of direction and destination.

It seems appropriate if Socrates’ arguments in the *Phaedo* are not perfectly satisfactory. On his last day, Socrates enhances his friends’ preparation for philosophy very little through leaving them with a record of perfect arguments, but greatly through

leaving them the means by which to create more of their own. If the *Phaedo* shows the apex and culmination of Socrates' methods, then his chief contribution was no one line of reasoning, but the hard-fought establishment of a small but affectionate, functioning philosophical community.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion: The Therapeutic Plato, Plato as Socrates' True Heir

It's not too hard to make a case that Plato treats his fictionalized Socrates as a point of departure. Consider, for example, that Plato wrote the *Phaedrus*, but near the end of that dialogue, his character Socrates makes a list of his suspicions and concerns about the medium of the written word.

Some of Socrates' concerns have to do with the relative vitality of writing, by comparison with that of internalized knowledge or of speech. Knowledge, Socrates affirms, is *alive* in the memory of the individual knower.¹ And the ephemeral nature of speech exercises the memory and places greater demands on the hearer (ultimately thereby promoting internalized knowledge). By contrast, the written word stores knowledge outside of the person. Socrates explores this concern through a myth (probably of his own devising) in which the king of the Egyptian gods warns the inventor of writing about the effect his invention will really have on the people it's supposed to benefit:

In fact, [writing] will introduce forgetfulness into the soul of those who learn it: they will not practice using their memory because they will put their trust in writing, which is external and depends on signs that belong to others, instead of trying to remember from the inside, completely on their own (*Phaedrus* 275a).

¹ It is actually the interlocutor, Phaedrus, having a nicely lucid moment, who describes knowledge within the soul as "the living, breathing discourse of the man who knows, of which the written [discourse] can be fairly called an image" (*Phaedrus* 276a), but Socrates seems very pleased with Phaedrus and is quick to call him "Absolutely right."

The Socrates of the *Phaedrus* claims that writing functions, at best, to remind (*Phaedrus* 275c-d). Returning to the same piece of writing again and again allows us to put back, at least temporarily, whatever we forgot about it. Socrates expresses the worry that this very option of a reminder actually trains readers to be more forgetful. What they read is less likely to permeate their souls.

Additional Socratic objections have to do with the ethical formation of the reader. To the extent that writing stores knowledge outside the person, Socrates says it promotes ignorance. Yet to the extent that readers perceive themselves as having ready access to knowledge (through written reminder), writing contributes to overconfidence (*Phaedrus* 275b). The coincidence of these two problems closely resembles the one, specific kind of unwisdom that the Socrates of the *Apology* believed he had overcome: failing to recognize one's own ignorance and falsely believing one knows what one does not know (*Apology* 21d-e). The Socrates of the *Phaedrus* says that the misplaced confidence of readers is additionally bad for their temperament; they become "difficult" to talk to.² If writing promotes ill-tempered reluctance to engage in reasonable discourse, poor self-knowledge, and failure of epistemic humility, then it is not good for readers.

And it might not be good for writers or the messages that they want to convey, either. If the written word lacks the vitality of the spoken word and does not enter into the person and become part of him or her, then it lacks rhetorical and pedagogical efficacy. Furthermore, Socrates objects that the static character of what has been written down

² The king of the Egyptian gods warns: "Your invention will enable them to hear many things without being properly taught, and they will imagine they have come to know much, while for the most part they will know nothing. And they will be difficult to get along with, since they will merely appear to be wise instead of really being so" (*Phaedrus* 275b).

limits both its security and its usefulness by preventing it from either answering questions or coming to its own defense:

You know, Phaedrus, writing shares a strange feature with painting. The offsprings of painting stand there as if they are alive, but if anyone asks them anything, they remain most solemnly silent. The same is true of written words. You'd think they were speaking as if they had some understanding, but if you question anything that has been said because you want to learn more, it continues to signify just that very same thing forever. When it has once been written down, every discourse roams about everywhere, reaching indiscriminately those with understanding no less than those who have no business with it, and it doesn't know to whom it should speak and to whom it should not. And when it is faulted and attacked unfairly, it always needs its father's support; alone it can neither defend itself nor come to its own support (*Phaedrus* 275d-e).

Perhaps it is on account of this problem--that writing is not capable of clarifying or expanding upon itself--that the Socrates of the *Phaedrus* calls a person who either considers writing "clear" or trusts writing to convey the instructions for his or her art, "naïve" (*Phaedrus* 276a).³

Embedded within this critique of writing are indications of Socrates' preferred alternatives. As aforementioned, Socrates prefers speech to writing. Even more specifically, he prefers dialectical speech to writing. Presumably this is because dialectical exchange not only employs speech (thereby disciplining the memory and,

³ Incidentally, Socrates is making a really interesting point here that I am not sure I fully understand. The *reason* Socrates thinks a writer would be "naïve" if she trusted writing to convey instructions to her art seems to be that, on account of the limited power of writing only to remind, writing can't teach an art the reader doesn't know in the first place. (It is just after such a writer is called naïve that Socrates goes on to say, "... how could they possibly think that words that have been written down can do more than remind those who already know what the writing is about?") (*Phaedrus* 275c-d). This take on the "reminders only" idea, however, seems stricter than usual, because earlier passages seemed to allow that writing *can* communicate an idea, only it alters the reader's state of mind in a way that diminishes motivation and receptivity. The idea can be expressed in the written text, but what is to motivate the reader to store it inside herself when it is already near-at-hand, on her book shelf?

hopefully, conducing to internalized knowledge), but actually mimics interpersonally the vital characteristics of a person's internalized knowledge. Knowledge within the soul is not static, for Socrates. It is not merely *a record*. Internalized knowledge doesn't just repeat the same thing over and over again. It responds to questions and to scrutiny. Because it is a part of a thinking person, it can come to its own defense. And unlike writing, internalized knowledge doesn't helplessly spill its contents to whomever wants to access it. It is disclosed--and adapted and augmented--mainly at the will of the person whose soul it inhabits.

A dialectical exchange between persons has similar characteristics. The participants are able to expand, explain, and modify their stated views. They may come to the defense of their own ideas, or call upon others to collaborate with them in making such a defense. The paradigmatic dialectical exchange has the ephemeral nature of speech, so participants can be responsive to their immediate rhetorical situation, choosing what words they think best suit their current audience and aims.

Finally, Socrates expresses his preferences in authors. He says that he prefers the author who writes playfully, for his own amusement, to the author who puts genuine faith in writing (*Phaedrus* 276d-e).⁴ Paradoxically, the author who writes for amusement's sake is, in Socrates' view, the more serious of the two characters, because he shows that he understands the limitations of the medium. Understanding the conceptual shortcomings of writing prepares the serious person to put writing in its place and to depend on it for no more than what it is able to offer, which, in the Socrates of the *Phaedrus*' stated view, seems mainly to be a kind of play.

⁴ Though the dialectician is preferred over any sort of writer at all (*Phaedrus* 276e).

Now, whether these collected problems with writing originate with the historical Socrates and are simply recounted by Plato, or whether Plato imaginatively attributes them to Socrates--or both--the Socrates of the *Phaedrus*' objections to writing clearly call for attention to Plato's own literary choices. Problems about writing are problems for writers. Plato might consider this Socrates' objections hyperbolic and unnecessary or significant and serious, but, either way, it makes sense to think that Plato believes he can overcome them. Because where the objections to writing brought the Socrates of the *Phaedrus* up short, Plato goes on ahead. Thus, the writing passage in the *Phaedrus* provides a fairly clear example of an instance where Plato uses the characters of a dialogue to present his audience with a 'problem' that the audience can then use to better interrogate the dialogue form as a proposed 'solution.'

For example--and perhaps most obviously--Platonic dialogues, though written down, resemble the dialectical exchanges preferred by the Socrates of the *Phaedrus*. This resemblance is most straight-forward where the Platonic dialogues explicitly portray dialectical exchanges, but persists to some extent even during passages where the characters give speeches and myths or simply converse. All these styles of dialogic speech preserve attention to the connections between ideologies, speech acts, and the nature of the souls that produce them, for example. Plato's written dialogues, like any other written texts, lack the power to add to their own contents, such that they can't really answer questions, explain themselves, or come to their own defense. But they can and do explicitly *model* interrogation of the ideas they present, and perhaps, by tending to investigate the ideas in question incompletely (as the dialogues so often do), excite something like interrogative aftershocks in the reader. It's not an uncommon experience

when reading Plato to be dissatisfied by the contributions of the interlocutors (or of Socrates himself) and to wish for the chance to interject one's own questions and suggestions into the conversation as outlined. Just as the *Phaedo* makes a far better story about how a high-stakes (literally, life and death) philosophical conversation can continue among the living after Socrates is gone than it does a series of conclusive arguments in favor of the immortality of the soul, Platonic dialogues excite open-ended interest in their subjects while modeling an imitable method (or methods) by which those subjects could be further pursued. To the extent that the dialogues convey knowledge at all, some assembly (in the soul of the reader) is required.

Because the kind of knowledge or insight that Platonic dialogues have to offer is also not the kind to be found in a fixed text stored outside the person, where the text remains at-hand, simply awaiting the chance to deliver a reminder. If Plato's dialogues remind, then what they are able to remind about is only a record of textual evidence-- patterns of argument and speeches assigned to characters within a dramatic situation. The dialogues do give some especially notable ideas pride of place, and they present some ideas significantly more plausible and more sophisticated than others, but ultimately deriving meaning from the dialogues' written contents demands working out some guiding scheme by which to interpret them. If the Platonic dialogues teach knowledge, it can only be a kind of knowledge that coalesces (or emerges) within the reader, in the act of interpretation. One kind of knowledge, for example, that Plato may have hoped is coming into being within the souls of his readers is the qualitative knowledge about what it would mean to live philosophically. Qualitative knowledge about participation in the

philosophical life comes into being within the reader, through the reader's reflecting on and reacting to 'witnessing' a philosophical interaction.

Socrates' model of interior and exterior knowledge (stored in souls versus stored in books) seems to take for granted that what is heard and remembered enters into the person and is preserved not slavishly, as a *mere* remembrance, but more vitally, as a considered part of the individual's outlook, with the capacity to expand, to alter, and to merge with other knowledge. His concerns about securing this vitality are, thus, at least twofold: If knowledge is to be communicated in a rhetorically efficacious way, then it must be transmitted in a way that's apt to permeate the soul. But simultaneously, the soul must be excited to come to its own defense through scrutinizing ideas rather than accepting them on authority, because to allow an idea to enter your soul is risk. The Socrates of the *Phaedrus* seemed to fear that writing fails at both these goals.

But in making his case against writing, he implicitly points ahead to Plato's unique approach to the written word, wherein the fundamental ambiguity of the dialogue form mitigates against the force of authority and excites the soul to examine the sources of ideas and to come to its own defense, while, at the same time, facilitating the permeation of the soul with philosophical insight. Can Plato escape the Socrates of the *Phaedrus*' reservations, if a dialogue only "repeats itself" so long as a given interpreter happens to take away the same conclusions each time he revisits the text? So long as the individual interpretation continues to stand up to each successive episode of scrutiny?

I would venture that Platonic dialogues *don't* really function to "remind," at least not in the limited way the Socrates of the *Phaedrus* seems to have intended. Rereading a Platonic dialogue reminds the reader of its textual details: the characters, the setting, the

dramatic action, the sequences of questions and arguments. But these items are actually the evidence from which the internalized meaning of the dialogue only derives. And arguably, the Socratic *elenchus* itself functions by “reminding” in a similar way. It reminds interlocutors about overlooked points of evidence within the set of their own beliefs. To remind someone that additional evidence exists and bears on the matter under consideration is not to render vital knowledge in the soul obsolete, it is to test the soundness of one’s existing beliefs. Platonic dialogues reward rereading through their potential to instigate, over time, new and superior readings, as more and more of the textual evidence is actually taken up into the reader’s understanding

In my earlier chapters, I worked to establish that the Socrates of the *Symposium* can be read as attempting to intervene therapeutically on behalf of friends who would like to practice philosophy--or who feel some allegiance to it, at any rate--but whose active engagement in the philosophical life has been obstructed and made burdensome by their failure to come to terms with what for Socrates is the essential philosophic condition: being in-between wisdom and ignorance and therefore also in-between poverty and resource. Through Plato’s characterization of the unhappy narrators Apollodorus and Aristodemus, and then through the wild display of pain made by Alcibiades near the dialogue’s conclusion, the *Symposium* reminds us that a sense of personal inadequacy or worthlessness can be a reason that someone might avoid seeking wisdom and ultimately love the truth less. In short, some of Socrates’ friends have a ‘problem.’ And according to my reading of the *Symposium*, Socrates is trying to ease it by offering these friends, as a ‘solution,’ an imitable positive vision of *Eros* as a paradigm for coexistence with poverty and resource.

But the dialogue shows that Socrates himself also has a ‘problem,’ and in his case, it is a rhetorical and pedagogical one. The *Symposium*’s narrative frame reveals not one but two characters who are still unhappy in their shame and would benefit by Socrates’ therapeutic lesson, but who, although manifestly able to *repeat* the lesson (as evidenced by their acts of narration), don’t seem to have internalized it or understood it. Although Apollodorus and Aristodemus ‘know’ the lesson--and Apollodorus in particular emphasizes his preparedness to recite it--the meaning and therapeutic significance of the *Eros* myth and of Socrates’ human philosophic example have not permeated their souls. These characters are still suffering in a state of philosophical barrenness.

In this chapter, by way of concluding my dissertation, I would like to apply the lesson of the *Phaedrus*’ writing passage: that where we see Socrates reach an impasse, Plato may be hoping the reader will ask how Plato himself can find a way-forward and continue on ahead--in this case, by struggling on past the problem of failed Socratic therapy that is dramatized in the *Symposium*.

Although the Socrates of the *Symposium* faithfully relied on speech (as per the Socrates of the *Phaedrus*’ stated preference), and although his words may well have been remembered accurately by his hearers, the narrative frame of the *Symposium* reveals that the therapeutic intent of Socrates’ speech did not enter into Apollodorus and Aristodemus’ souls with vitality. Thus, the question becomes whether and how Plato can do better. What we can know about the Platonic response to this rhetorical and pedagogical problem will be ascertained mainly through Plato’s own rhetorical and pedagogical (that is, literary) choices. If there is a therapeutic Plato who can inherit the therapy of Socrates but also exceed him, then that therapeutic Plato will be revealed to contemporary students

of Plato mainly in the dialogue form. I would like to end by suggesting a few ways that Plato may be hoping the dialogue form can enhance his readers' preparation for philosophy, perhaps thereby helping them to overcome obstacles like obstructive shame and revealing Plato as the true heir of Socrates' earnest but flawed therapeutic legacy.

First, and likely most obviously, everything worthwhile that the character Socrates models in the course of the dialogues, Plato inherits. If Socrates is a possible creature, and if we are relevantly similar to him, then the variety of philosophical methods we witness Socrates adopt as coping mechanisms for coexisting with poverty and resource can be our coping mechanisms, as well. When Socrates introduces the youths of the *Lysis* into conversation with Beauty, perhaps for the first time, he introduces Plato's readers also (*Lysis* 216c-d). When Socrates models for the boys his response to *aporia*, showing them how one can persist in the conversation despite whatever discouragement one may feel at the moments when there is no clear way-forward, he performs the resurrection of his *erotic* spirit for Plato's readers also (*Lysis* 218c). When Socrates "risks belief" in a beautiful myth, encouraging his friends to agree that "a man should repeat this [beautiful story] to himself as if it were an incantation," Plato's readers can also experience the exaltation and creativity of Socrates' rhetoric (*Phaedo* 114d-e). And when Socrates invites refutation as a benefaction rather than shrinking from it as a blow, the possibility of collaborative refutation is presented to Socrates' interlocutors and Plato's readers alike. Indeed, we can suspect Socrates' motives and character, we can worry, even, that Plato's Socrates gives lip service to a collaborative and generous spirit while thriving on the *schadenfreude* of defeating his rivals in a public contest, and that possibility of a collaborative, mutually-beneficial

approach to refutation will still rate consideration on its own merits. If any of Socrates' methods are themselves useful and good, Plato can inherit their goodness, even if/when we take them to be modeled by a disingenuous Socrates.

Meanwhile, however, it is possible that the dialogue form may have the power to avert some potentially obstructive emotional responses to philosophical inquiry and arouse, instead, new and different patterns. (By contrast, that is, with the patterns the character Socrates discovered *he* was likely to elicit). The Socratic origin stories of the *Apology* told how Socrates' well-intentioned person-to-person elenctic "investigations" did not produce the relationship with his fellow citizens that Socrates says he had in mind (*Apology* 21e-22a). On the one hand, Socrates found that he was mistakenly loved for reasons he did not want to be loved. He reports that the *elenchus* attracted observers and imitators, because people love to witness others being questioned (*Apology* 23c-d). Fascination at the spectacle of a new *agon* seems to have trumped the community's desire for collaborative and mutually beneficial truth-seeking. Then, out of this misbegotten type of popularity, Socrates acquired a false reputation for wisdom--a reputation that did not honor him, because it fundamentally misunderstood what Socrates took to be the truth about his own relationship with, at best, "merely human" wisdom (*Apology* 20d-e, 29b). On the other hand, Socrates' investigations also made many enemies, alienated him from the city, and possibly had the unintentional effect of demoralizing some of Socrates' own friends and loved ones, through attention to their poverty.

If poverty is an inescapable part of the philosophic condition, then Plato cannot outright prevent obstructive and misplaced shame in response to that poverty. Even if there were some way to speak or write about philosophy that could shield nascent

philosophers from awareness of their poverty and ignorance (and assuming for the sake of argument that this were somehow also a responsible pedagogy), so long as the reality of the soul's deficits actually persists, there will be other ways for a person to learn of them. And so long as there is any way to be confronted with one's own poverty, it will be possible to experience deep shame--fitting, misplaced, or both--in response to the deficits of the soul.

What Plato certainly can do, however, is to populate his dialogues with a wide variety of possible analogues--characters who call particular attention to our poverty, characters who call particular attention to our resource, and characters who remind Plato's readers of the subtly complex ways poverty and resource concur in the life of the individual. There can be a Phaedrus, who may be quite a silly, lusty, and venal personality in many respects,⁵ and too easily pleased, but who seems to inspire reproduction (of speeches) wherever he goes, and who has the occasional bright idea. There can be a Lysis or a Menexenus, whose youth and immaturity (poverty) actually turn out function, under Socrates' guidance, as prototypical for philosophic preparedness (resource) and which can perhaps be groomed and cultivated into maturity. And there can be a Socrates, who may be lingering outside Agathon's gate alone because he has caught hold of an insight, or because he is laying a trap for the truth in a state of strategic receptivity--or because for the moment he can see no way-forward.

Were I to participate in a real life, person-to-person dialectical exchange with Socrates, I know which of the participants I would be most likely to identify with: myself. The probable advantages to this state of affairs would be that my first-hand participation

⁵ I owe to the Baylor Philosophy Plato reading group the prompting to more closely consider the appetitive and venal aspects of Phaedrus' character.

in the conversation would give me the opportunity to shape our exchange by responding exactly as I wish, and that any chastening to take place would be likely to be felt with the keenest immediacy. On the other hand, it might be very difficult for me to see around my own hackles, my pride, and other assorted personal concerns looming in my peripheral vision. Unless I love the truth (and the pursuit of it) so much that I cannot help but keep on saying the kinds of things that Philosophy would have me say, I might find whatever desire I feel for active participation obstructed by, for example, misplaced shame. People like to witness *others* being questioned.

Plato's dialogues likely take hold of this very attraction to spectatorship and put it to work. They are stories about other people being questioned. But once a reader has somehow been captured into the act of reading them, each character transforms into an argument from analogy that concludes with a claim of possibility. (Insofar as one is relevantly similar to the character, that is). It is possible to see oneself in any of the characters--including Socrates. Tentatively, we might consider whether Plato's dialogues "chasten and arouse"⁶ in a way that parallels what I have called provisional rhetoric. The characterization is an indictment if it is relevant--if it lands. The characterization is an affirmation if it is relevant, also.

Parthian Shot

In the introduction to my dissertation, I said I would much sooner abandon my reading of Plato's *Symposium* (were it shown to account poorly for the textual evidence of the dialogue) than abandon the conviction that Plato's dialogues are highly ordered,

⁶ See Gary Alan Scott, *Plato's Socrates as Educator*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000) as well as Chapter Three of this dissertation in which I discuss Scott's "chastening and arousal" model of Socratic pedagogy.

very deliberately composed, and reward close attention not only to their argumentative contents but to the literary contexts in which the arguments are given. A consequence of this order and complexity, I believe, is that although the dialogues' individual arguments can certainly be fruitfully examined and critiqued outside their literary contexts (just like any arguments),⁷ the best chance of understanding what really matters to Plato will always be to look for the underlying patterns that coherently unify details of characterization, setting, dramatic action, (etc.), *and* the contents of the arguments themselves.

When I projected that this dissertation itself might be sufficient to function as an extended example of the philosophical potential inherent in reading Plato along these lines, it was certainly not from any particularly high estimation of my prowess as an individual reader or as a writer of dissertations. Rather, simply make enough factual statements in a row about the details of Plato's dialogues, and I believe before long, emergent patterns in those details will make themselves incorrigible. In other words, I suspect that quantity of attention alone can make this point, even where it may be paired with significantly imperfect quality of attention.

And if I have been right about even that much and have made enough statements in a row about Plato to show some of the possibilities that emerge when philosophy is done with an eye to genre, then my next hope would be to continue to collaborate in the reclamation of genre as a tool of professional philosophical scholarship. I believe that Plato--and Kierkegaard, and St. Augustine, and Nietzsche, and St. Thomas Aquinas, and

⁷ Would Socrates have it any other way? Critique of arguments can be an important activity even when we're not sure if the one making the arguments stands behind them and affirms their premises.

Iris Murdoch--confronted real philosophical problems by recourse to genre. I believe that genre is *resource* and can be, for both readers and writers of philosophy, an aperture and a way-forward. To pass on to others, in whatever capacity I am able, these interpretive tools is my particular philosophical dream, and I feel only the utmost gratitude to those who first taught me, without whom none of the foregoing would have been possible.

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