

## 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

by

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A Dissertation

Approved by the Department of Philosophy

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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.































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).<sup>11</sup> 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,<sup>12</sup> 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.

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<sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> 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>.































































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

















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?*<sup>5</sup>

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.

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<sup>5</sup> 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.









Over the course of the conversation, Socrates readily concedes that rhetoric is influential and persuasive (*Gorgias* 453a).<sup>7</sup> 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

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<sup>7</sup> In fact, Socrates actually helps Gorgias to this point!



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.







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.<sup>12</sup>

Tarnopolsky affirms that Plato follows his peers in this respect.<sup>13</sup> 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.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.





of an actual, imagined, or internalized other.<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> 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).<sup>17</sup> 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

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

<sup>16</sup> 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.

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



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







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.









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







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









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:

















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 shame<sup>2</sup>," 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

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(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.

<sup>2</sup> 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).



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.)<sup>3</sup> 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*<sup>4</sup>, Socrates accompanies a young friend (Hippocrates) who is eager to hear a visiting expert (the eponymous Protagoras), just as the Socrates of the

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<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.



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)?<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> 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'





## *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')?"<sup>7</sup> 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

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<sup>7</sup> 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.



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*.



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.



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)





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!<sup>10</sup> 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"

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<sup>10</sup> 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.



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.



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



figure of myth (*Phaedrus* 229b-e).<sup>14</sup> 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.

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<sup>14</sup> 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.





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



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



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,



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.<sup>16</sup> 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 right<sup>17</sup> in the dialogues that dramatize these most-promising encounters, ascribing to Socrates a model of "arousal and chastening"

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

<sup>17</sup> 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





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



## 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"<sup>1</sup> 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).<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> We discover as much when Apollodorus immediately launches

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

<sup>3</sup> 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



Apollodorus is casually insulting to his conversation partners (and his first-hand source),<sup>4</sup> cynical, negative to the point of caricature, and describes himself--though perhaps with a sarcastic edge--as both a “failure” and a “maniac.”<sup>5</sup> 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

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<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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).



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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> If every philosopher is a lover,

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<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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





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.<sup>9</sup> 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,

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<sup>9</sup> "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).



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,<sup>10</sup> and the abiding, even helpless, love for Philosophy that Socrates speaks about in the *Gorgias*<sup>11</sup> 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

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<sup>10</sup> 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?'"

<sup>11</sup> 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).



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.



(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.<sup>13</sup> Socrates, however, will explicitly call Diotima, a woman, "wise," not only about love but about

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<sup>13</sup> 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.





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.<sup>15</sup> By comparison, the ironic tone that Socrates often takes with his own interlocutors, though perhaps patronizing or cutting, is still significantly less authoritative. However

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<sup>15</sup> 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.



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.<sup>16</sup> 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

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<sup>16</sup> "How do you think you'll ever master the art of love if you 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).



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

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



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.<sup>18</sup> 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

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<sup>18</sup> 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).





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



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.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> 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

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<sup>20</sup> 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.

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



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.<sup>23</sup> 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

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<sup>23</sup> 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).



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.<sup>24</sup>

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

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





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,<sup>26</sup> 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

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<sup>26</sup> See the *Apology*, which I will develop in the next chapter.



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.<sup>27</sup> 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).<sup>28</sup> 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

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<sup>27</sup> Beginning with 213c, in particular.

<sup>28</sup> 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.



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).<sup>29</sup>

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.

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<sup>29</sup> 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.



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.<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup>

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

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<sup>31</sup> This observation I owe specifically to conversation with Anne-Marie Schultz.

<sup>32</sup> 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.





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



## 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



*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



The *Apology*<sup>5</sup> and *Phaedo*,<sup>6</sup> 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

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<sup>5</sup> 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.

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





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,<sup>7</sup> 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).

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<sup>7</sup> No students are mentioned wrestling, but several are competing in games with knucklebones.



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,<sup>8</sup> 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

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<sup>8</sup> 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).



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



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.





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.



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



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.



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





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).<sup>12</sup> 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,

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<sup>12</sup> 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.



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



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 teacher<sup>13</sup>, 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,

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<sup>13</sup> 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 together 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.<sup>14</sup>

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

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<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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).

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<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

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<sup>2</sup> 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).<sup>3</sup>

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,

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<sup>3</sup> 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).<sup>4</sup> 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.

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<sup>4</sup> 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,<sup>5</sup> 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

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<sup>5</sup> 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"<sup>6</sup> 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,

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<sup>6</sup> 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),<sup>7</sup> 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

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<sup>7</sup> 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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