The Symposium

APOLLODORUS: I should be able to tell you the story— 172
I've practiced it enough. Why, just the day before yesterday I was going up to Athens from my home in Phalerum[1] when a man I know saw me and called after me playfully: "Hey, Apollodorus! Wait for me, you Phalerian!"

So I waited. He caught up with me and said: "Apollodorus, I've been looking all over for you. I want to hear about that party of Agathon's with Socrates and Alcibiades and all the b
rest—what were the love speeches like? Someone else told me about them, but his story wasn't very clear. He had heard it from Phoenix, Philip's son, and he said you knew about it too. So tell me the whole thing. As Socrates' friend you're the one to report what he says. But first, were you there?"

"The story couldn't have been very clear," I said, "if you think the party was so recent that I could have been there." c

"That's the impression I got," he said.

"I don't see how, Glaucon," I said. "You know that Agathon moved out of Athens years ago,[2] and I've been with Socrates for less than three. Since then, I've been with him every day and made it my business to know everything he says and does. Before that, I just ran around in circles like you. I 173
thought I was doing something important and philosophy was just a waste of time, but really I was a miserable fool—like you."

"Stop joking and answer my question," he said. "When was the party?"

[1] **A harbor** about three miles southwest of Athens. One must walk "up" to reach the city.

[2] **Agathon** moved to Macedonia about 407 B.C. and died there about 401. The external dialogue therefore takes place about 402, "years" after 407, but before 401 (since Agathon is spoken of as being still alive).

"We were still children," I said. "Agathon had just won first prize with his first tragedy.[3] It was the day after he celebrated the victory with his players."

"That really was long ago," he said. "But who told you—Socrates?"

b "No," I said, "the same one that told Phoenix: a fellow called Aristodemus of Cydathenaeum—a little man who always went barefoot. He had been there, and as far as I could tell, he was one of Socrates' most ardent lovers at the time. Of course I've checked some of the details with Socrates, and they agree with what Aristodemus said."

"Why not tell it to me then?" he said. "We may as well talk as we go into town."

c So I told it and got some practice, as I said. I guess I can tell it again if you gentlemen really want to hear it. Philosophical talk ravishes me anyhow, besides being useful, and I love it as much when I'm talking as when I listen to somebody else. But your rich businessmen's talk makes me exasperated. I feel sorry for you as my friends because what you consider so d important is really just waste of time.

Now maybe you think that I'm a miserable dog. Well, I think so too. But I don't think you fellows are miserable—I know damn well you are!

COMPANION: You're always the same, Apollodorus. You insult everyone, including yourself, and you seem to think that everyone but Socrates is absolutely wretched. I don't know where you got the nickname "Maniac" from, but every time you open your mouth you surely act like one: You snap and snarl at your friends, at yourself—at everyone but Socrates.

e APOLLODORUS: So you think this attitude proves I'm mad and out of tune?

COMPANION: Let's not argue about it now, Apollodorus. Please, just do as we asked and tell us those speeches.

174 APOLLODORUS: All right, they were something like this. But wait, I'll try to tell it all from the beginning, the way Aristodemus told it to me.

Well, Aristodemus said he ran into Socrates, freshly bathed

[3] **Greek dramatists** competed in the theater for first, second, and third prize. Agathon presented his first tragedy in 416 B.C.; he therefore gave his party about fourteen years before this telling of it.

and wearing fancy shoes instead of being barefoot. So he asked him where he was going all dressed up like that.

"To dinner at Agathon's," Socrates answered (said Aristodemus). "I didn't go to the victory celebration yesterday because I was afraid of the crowd, so I promised I'd come today. That's why I'm all dressed up: 'beauty to beauty.' Say, how do you feel about going to dinner uninvited?" b

"However you say," I said (said Aristodemus).

"Come along then," said Socrates. "We'll pervert the old proverb: 'birds of a feather flock together.' Homer, you know, had the insolence to corrupt it completely. He made Agamemnon a great warrior but his brother Menelaus 'a soft c spearman.'[4] Then, when Agamemnon was giving a feast, Menelaus came uninvited. So the poorer man went to the better man's feast. The result of course was that 'birds of a kind were caught in a bind.'"

"If I go, Socrates, I'm afraid I'll be following Menelaus's example instead of yours—a nobody going to an intellectual's feast. So think up a good defense because I won't admit that I came uninvited. I'll say you invited me." d

"We'll put our heads together[5] and figure something out on the way," said Socrates. "Let's go."

Their conversation was something like that, said Aristodemus, and then they left. But on the way Socrates somehow fell into thought and stopped. Aristodemus stopped too, but Socrates told him to go on ahead. So he did. But, he said, when he got to Agathon's place he found himself in an embarrassing situation: The door was open and a slave e rushed out and brought him in to the guests, who were just getting ready to eat. The moment Agathon saw him, he cried, "Aristodemus, hello! You're just in time for dinner. If you've come for anything else, you'll have to put it off. I was looking for you yesterday to give you an invitation, but I couldn't find you anywhere. But why didn't you bring Socrates?"

"I turned around," said Aristodemus, "and he wasn't following me. So I said that I *had* brought Socrates. In fact, he had brought me."

"Fine," said Agathon. "Where is he"

"He was right behind me. I wonder where he is." 175

[4] **The phrase** is from *Iliad* 17.588. Menelaus comes uninvited in *Iliad* 2.402-410.

[5] **A quotation** from *Iliad* 10.224.

He said Agathon turned to a slave: "Go look for him and bring him here, will you, boy? Aristodemus, please sit by Eryximachus."

Aristodemus said one of the boys brought water and helped him wash. Then the other boy returned and said, "That Socrates has gone into a neighbor's porch. He just stands there. When I called he wouldn't come."

"That's odd," Agathon replied (said Aristodemus). "Call him again and don't take no for an answer."

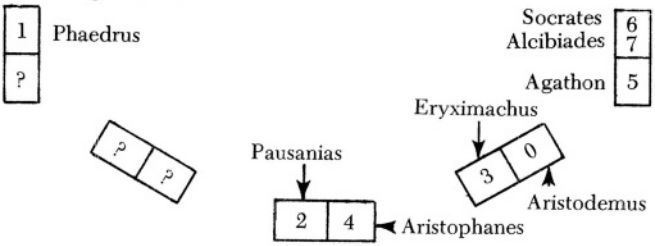
b "Leave him alone," I demanded (said Aristodemus). "This is a habit of his—he goes off and stands wherever he happens to be. I'm sure he'll be along soon if you leave him alone. Don't bother him."

"Well, whatever you say," Agathon replied (said Aristodemus). "Now, boys, please serve us. Do it however you like—the way you do when no one's standing over you, which is something that *I* would never do. Pretend that we are your

c guests and you have to please us and earn our compliments."

Then they ate, he said, but still no Socrates. Agathon suggested they send after him again, but Aristodemus said that he wouldn't let them. Socrates finally came in when they were half done with dinner. Considering his habits, he hadn't been away very long. "Come over here and sit by me," said Agathon—he was reclining alone on the right[6]—"I want

[6] **Guests reclined** in pairs on couches, with a small portable table for their food. The seating arrangement at Agathon's symposium was something like this:



The far left, where Phaedrus is sitting, was the place of honor. The host usually took the lowest place, on the far right. Agathon occupies this position until Socrates arrives and reclines to his right. Alcibiades arrives late (212d) and sits between Agathon and Socrates. At the end (223b), Agathon moves to sit on Socrates' right. The speakers speak from left to right as indicated by the numbers. Aristophanes and Eryximachus exchange turns. Question marks indicate unnamed guests, whose speeches are not reported. Aristodemus, the narrator, apparently gives no speech.

to touch you and get some of that wisdom that came to you in the porch. I know you have it; you wouldn't have left till you did." d

Aristodemus said Socrates sat down and said: "It would be nice if wisdom were as you say, Agathon, and it would flow from a full person to an emptier one when they touched, as water through wool from a full to an empty cup. If it did, I couldn't imagine anything more valuable than sitting by you e because I know you'd fill me with beautiful wisdom. My wisdom's a poor, dubious thing—like a dream—but yours is brilliant and effusive. Why, just the day before yesterday you displayed your youthful brilliance and dazzled more than thirty thousand witnesses from all over Greece."[7]

"Don't be insolent, Socrates," Agathon replied (said Aristodemus). "In a little while you and I will settle this dispute over wisdom, and Dionysus will be the judge. But now eat your dinner."

He said Socrates reclined, and they finished their dinner. 176 Then they poured the libations, chanted the hymn to the gods, and performed the other rituals.[8] Next they turned to the drinking. Pausanias, he said, opened the discussion something like this: "Well, gentlemen, what's the easiest way to handle the drinking? To tell the truth, I'm still in bad shape from yesterday and could use a little recuperation. I think you could too, since most of you were here. So how shall we go about it?" b

Aristophanes, said Aristodemus, replied: "As you say, Pausanias—the easiest way. I was completely stupefied yesterday."

"I agree," said Eryximaches, son of Acumenus. "Now how about Agathon? Are you up to it today?"

"No, I'm not up to it either."

[7] **By presenting** his prize-winning tragedy. "Youthful" contrasts Agathon's youth with Socrates' age (he was fifty-three in 416 B.C.). Dionysus, below, was the god of both wine and the drama.

[8] **A dinner** was distinct from a symposium, or drinking party, which now follows. The dinner was formally concluded by a hymn and libations to the gods. A symposium was governed by formal rules, which is why Pausanias asks about the drinking procedure. There was normally a "master of ceremonies," who prescribed the manner of drinking and the accompanying activities. Here Phaedrus serves as the leader until Alcibiades later (213e) appoints himself master of ceremonies.

c "We would consider it an absolute godsend," observed Eryximachus (said Aristodemus), "—particularly Aristodemus, Phaedrus, and I—if you heavy drinkers were temporarily incapacitated, because we never have any capacity. I exempt Socrates from my remarks; he doesn't care one way or the other—either way will suit him. Now, since none of the present company seems particularly inclined to overindulge, this may be an auspicious occasion for me to explain the true nature of drink. The findings of medical
d science have convinced me that intoxication is detrimental to the health. I would never intentionally drink to excess or advise one of my patients to do so, especially if he still had a hangover from the previous day."

"I always do whatever you say," interrupted Phaedrus the Myrrhinusian, "especially in medical matters. The others will too, if they have any sense."

e So, said Aristodemus, everyone agreed to drink more for pleasure than to get drunk.

"I take it we are resolved then," continued Eryximachus, "to drink only as much as we wish and to compel no one to drink more. I now move that we dismiss this flute girl who has just come in. She can play to herself or to the women inside while we spend the time in conversation. If you're wondering what kind, I've a proposal to make."

177 Aristodemus said they told him to make it.

"The beginning of my speech," Eryximachus began (said Aristodemus), "is taken from Euripides' *Melanippe*:[9] 'Not mine the tale'—but Phaedrus's here. More than once Phaedrus has accosted me and indignantly complained: 'Isn't it a scandal, Eryximachus, that of all the poets who have written hymns and odes to the gods, not one has ever seen fit to compose a poem in honor of the great and venerable god of
b Love? And if you look through the works of the great sophists, like Prodicus, you'll find plenty of prose eulogies to Heracles and other heroes, but not a single one to Love. That's outrageous enough, but recently I came across a book by some sophist who had composed a marvelous encomium
c on—the usefulness of salt! About drivel like that they make a terrible fuss, but not one soul has yet had the nerve to write a decent hymn to Love. A god is neglected while salt gets extolled to the skies!'

[9] **A lost tragedy.** Prodicus, below, was a famous sophist whose specialty was the precise definition of words.

"I move Phaedrus's point as well taken. I would therefore like to favor him publicly by suggesting this as a fitting occasion to adorn the neglected god. If that seems congenial d
to you, I'm sure we'll find sufficient entertainment in speeches. Here is my proposal: Each of us will give a speech—as beautiful as he can make it—in praise of Love. We shall go from left to right, beginning with Phaedrus, who not only is sitting the first on the left, but is also the father of the speech."

"No one will vote against you, Eryximachus," said Socrates (according to Aristodemus). "I hardly could, because love is the only thing that I claim to know. Neither could Agathon and Pausanias, and certainly not Aristophanes, who e
devotes all his time to Dionysus[10] and Aphrodite. As far as I can see, we'll all second your proposal, even if it won't be a fair contest for us who speak last. But if the first speakers do a good job, we'll be satisfied. So go ahead, Phaedrus, and good luck."

Aristodemus said the others concurred and urged Phaedrus to begin.

Now Aristodemus couldn't remember every speech in 178
detail, and I can't remember everything he told me. But I'll relate the main points of each speech I consider worth telling.

SPEECH OF PHAEDRUS

Well, as I said, Phaedrus was the first speaker. Aristodemus said he opened with something about Love being a great god, amazing among gods and men. "The reasons are many," he said, "but chief is his birth. Love is revered as the most ancient of gods. Here is my proof: Love has no parents. No one, b
layman or poet, has ever disputed that. Hesiod, in fact, confirms it when he says that first Chaos was born, and then 'Broad-bosomed Earth, sure, eternal foundation of all,/ and Love.'[11] Acusilaus agrees that after Chaos these two, Earth and Love, were born. And Parmenides says that Birth 'Planned Love as first of all the gods.' Thus from all sides it is c
agreed that Love is an ancient and venerable god.

[10] **As patron god** of the theater. Aphrodite was the goddess of love.

[11] **The quotation** is from *Theogony* 117. Acusilaus was a poet whose works are lost. Parmenides was an early fifth-century philosopher who believed that "everything is one." Therefore there can be no change or plurality in the real world. The visible world of change is an illusion.

"Being ancient and venerable, Love is the source of great blessings to man. And the greatest blessing I can name is for a young boy to find a good lover and a lover a good boy. To live a beautiful life a man must be guided by a principle which nothing—neither birth, nor wealth, nor office—can so
d beautifully inspire as Love. This principle is shame for the shameful and emulation of the beautiful. Without that, neither a city nor an individual can do anything beautiful or great. Suppose a man in love is caught doing something shameful or suffering it because he's too cowardly to resist: I say he'll be more distressed if seen by his loved one than if by a
e friend or even his father. The same for a loved one—he'll be terribly ashamed if his lover sees him do something ugly.

"If there were a way to give birth to a state or an army of nothing but lovers and loved ones who would shun shameful activity while vying with each other for honor, that would be
179 the best possible organization, and in battle a few such men could defeat practically the whole world. A loving man would never throw away his sword or break ranks if he knew his loved one would see him; he'd rather die a thousand deaths. As for abandoning his loved one or not helping him in danger, no one is so base that Love cannot inspire him with
b courage, as though he were noble by nature. In short, the effect Homer describes of 'a god breathing might'[12] into heroes is Love's effect upon lovers, brought forth from himself.

"And only lovers—not only men, but women too—will die for the sake of another. Alcestis, daughter of Pelias, provides sufficient proof of that for us Greeks. She was the only one willing to die for her husband, and though his parents still
c lived, she so far excelled them in affection because of Love that she showed them to be strangers to their son and parents only in name. So beautiful was this act judged to be by both gods and men that the gods granted Alcestis a favor they've conferred upon only a tiny number of all those who have done beautiful deeds: Out of admiration for her they allowed
d her soul to return from the dead. Thus even gods award the highest honors to courage and diligence in Love.

[12] **The reference** is to *Iliad* 10.482, 15.60, etc. Alcestis, below, is the heroine of Euripides' *Alcestis*. She makes a bargain with Death to die in place of her husband Admetus so that he may go on living.

"But Orpheus,[13] son of Oeagrus, was sent back from Hades undone. He had gone for his wife, but the gods gave him only a phantom because they considered him a weakling (he was merely a minstrel) who didn't dare to die for love, like Alcestis, but had sneaked into Hades alive. Therefore they justly made his death be delivered by women; they didn't honor him and send him to the Isles of the Blest, as they did e
Achilles, Thetis' son. Achilles had learned from his mother that he would die at Troy if he killed Hector; if not, he would die at home of old age. Nevertheless, he dared to avenge his lover Patroclus and chose not merely to die in his place but to 180
follow him into death. Hence the gods' extreme admiration and honor for him: he had considered his lover to be so important.

"Aeschylus talks nonsense when he says Achilles was Patroclus's lover rather than his loved one.[14] Achilles was more beautiful than Patroclus or any hero, much younger and still beardless, as Homer says. Much as the gods honor excellence[15] in love, they are truly amazed, astounded, and b
happy at the affection of a loved one—more so than at the

[13] **A legendary musician.** When his wife Eurydice died, Orpheus persuaded the lord of the underworld to allow him to bring her back, on condition that he not look back at her until they reached the upper world. He did look back and so lost her. Phaedrus changes the story for his own purposes. The scene below between Achilles and his mother Thetis is from *Iliad* 18.73-137. Achilles is placed on the Isles of the Blest by Pindar in *Olympian* 2.68-83.

[14] **In the** *Myrmidons*, a lost tragedy. As usual in Plato, love is presented primarily as pederastic: the love between a man and a youth. The distinction made here and throughout the dialogue between "lover" and "loved one" is common in Greek, though it may puzzle an English reader. We tend to emphasize the similarity and equality that exists between (as we say) "a pair of lovers." The Greeks, however, emphasized the difference and disparity between them. They thought of the relationship as resembling that between master and slave; the loved one has the power to control the one who loves him. There must always be a lover and a loved one; never two lovers (impossible by definition). The reference to Homer, which follows, is to *Iliad* 2.673 and 11.786.

[15] *Arete*, traditionally translated as "virtue." Its basic sense is excellence or ability at something—being good at it. Though strictly a limited term (excellence *at* something), Plato tends to make it absolute: the excellence or virtue that makes any thing distinctively that which it is, especially that which makes a man a man.

lover's affection for him. The lover is more divine than the loved one; he is possessed by a god. That's why the gods honored Achilles more than Alcestis and sent him to the Isles of the Blest.

"Thus I maintain that Love is the most ancient and honored of gods, most effective in providing excellence and happiness for all men, living and dead."

c Phaedrus's speech was something like that, said Aristodemus, and then came several speeches that he couldn't remember very well. So he skipped them and went on to the speech of Pausanias.

SPEECH OF PAUSANIAS

Pausanias (said Aristodemus) began like this: "Phaedrus, I think your proposal was bad, to eulogize Love in this simple way. If Love were one, it would be all right. But Love is not one. Since he is not one, the proper way to proceed is first to
d proclaim which Love to praise. I shall try to set this straight by telling first which Love to praise and then by praising him as he deserves.

"We all know: no Love, no Aphrodite.[16] If she were one, Love were one. But she is two, so Love is two. Of course there are two Aphrodites. The older is the motherless daughter of Uranus. We call her Uranian Aphrodite. The younger is the daughter of Zeus and Dione. We call her Common Aphrodite.
e We're thus compelled to call the Love who works with the first goddess Heavenly Love, the other Common Love. We must properly praise all the gods, but I must try to present this pair's prerogatives.

"Every act is neutral, neither beautiful nor ugly in itself.
181 Take what we're doing—drinking, singing, or speaking: None in itself is beautiful. Beauty only comes from doing, the way an act is done. If done properly, it's beautiful, otherwise not. So for loving and Love: Not all are beautiful and worth our praise; only the one who turns us to beautiful loving.

"Common Love is truly common and doesn't care what he
b does. This is the Love that worthless people love. These love

[16] **I.e., "no love, no sex."** Aphrodite was the goddess of sexual love and so is often used as a synonym for sex. The dual mythology of Love and Aphrodite which follows is probably Plato's own invention. Uranus is Heaven (one of the Titans, or elder gods). "Uranian" is therefore synonymous with "Heavenly."

women as much as boys, their bodies more than their souls, and they even prefer their loved ones to be perfectly mindless because all they want is action, regardless of how it's done. Hence they do whatever they feel like, indifferent to good and bad. Their Love comes from the young goddess who shared at c
birth in both the male and the female. But Heavenly Love loves boys and comes from the Aphrodite who shared not in the female but only in the male and who is older and free from insolence. Hence men fired by that Love pursue males; they dote on the naturally strong and intelligent. Even in pederasty you can spot the lovers driven by pure Heavenly Love. They don't love young boys but wait till they start to d
have sense, which is when they begin to get their first beard.

"I think a lover who starts with a boy at that age shows his true intent: to spend his life with him. He doesn't deceive a senseless child, then laugh and flit off in contempt to some other young thing. There should be a law against loving young boys; it would save a lot of energy from being squandered on uncertain affairs. It's always uncertain how a e
young boy will turn out—sound in mind and body or not. Good men impose this law on themselves, but we should force the herd to obey it too, just as we keep them, as far as we can, from making love to free-born women. These are the 182
lovers that give Love a bad name: People look at them and see their unfairness and lack of tact and dare to call it ugly to gratify[17] lovers. You'd hardly think anyone could criticize this or anything else that's done in a fair, orderly way.

"The love customs in most states are easy to grasp; they're simple. But here they're complex. In Elis, Boeotia,[18] and b
wherever people are unskilled at speech, they simply call gratifying a lover beautiful. No one there would call it ugly, mainly so they won't have to use words to persuade the young men, which they couldn't do anyway. But in Ionia and other places controlled by the Persians they regard gratifying lovers as ugly. These barbarians even consider sports and philosophy shameful, owing to their despotic government.

[17] **To "gratify" or "favor"** a lover is a polite euphemism for sexual intercourse.

[18] **Elis and Boeotia** were considered by the Athenians to be backwater areas, and the Boeotians were considered particularly stupid. Ionia, below, was the Greek Asia Minor seacoast. Being close to Persia, it was often under Persian domination.

c Absolute rulers could hardly tolerate big ideas, strong friendships, and tight associations among their subjects—precisely the things that sports and philosophy, but especially Love, tend to produce. The Athenian tyrants[19] learned that the hard way: Aristogiton and Harmodius had such a solid friendship that it brought down their government. So wherever custom calls it ugly to gratify
d lovers, it rests on the lawmakers' malice, the rulers' greed, and the subjects' cowardice. Where it proclaims it a simple good, the law stems from the mental indolence of its makers.

"But we have a beautiful custom and, as I said, one not easy to grasp. Reflect how we value open love above the furtive kind, especially the love of noble, aristocratic young men (even if they're homlier than the others); how much encouragement a lover gets from all sides (hardly as though loving were regarded as shameful!); how a conquest enhances
e his reputation while failure destroys it; how, in attempting a seduction, a lover receives permission to do things that would
183 bring him the vilest disgrace if attempted for any other motive but love—if, say, a man wanted money or office or power from someone and stooped to do the things that lovers do to their sweethearts—making pleas and entreaties, swearing eternal vows, sleeping on their doorsteps, offering to be their slaves and to do things for them that no real slave would ever do—why, his friends and enemies alike would restrain him,
b his friends by rebuking him and feeling ashamed, his enemies by denouncing him as a servile, groveling flatterer, whereas a lover who does these very same things is not merely excused but set above criticism, as though seduction were considered a beautiful thing, while the strangest thing of all, according to public opinion, is that the gods forgive a lover—and no one else—for breaking an oath because 'a sex oath is no oath';
c therefore, so our custom declares, both gods and men grant a lover complete license to do whatever he wants—reflect upon that, and you'll be forced to conclude that our custom creates a perfect climate for both loving and being friendly to lovers. But when fathers assign slaves to keep their sons from talking to lovers, and when a boy's friends criticize him
d if they see him talking to one, and when these boys' elders

[19] **Athens** was ruled by tyrants from 546 to 510 B.C. In 514, Harmodius and Aristogiton assassinated the tyrant's brother and so helped bring down the tyranny.

don't even try to control them or scold them for their vicious tongues—when you see things like that, you might well conclude that the custom here is the ugliest of all.

"The truth, I believe, is as I said at the start: gratifying a lover is not a simple act, beautiful or ugly in itself. It depends how it's done: It's beautiful if done beautifully, ugly if not. Ugly means gratifying a base lover basely; beautiful means gratifying a good lover well. A base lover is that common lover, who loves the body more than the soul; he's fickle e
because what he loves is unstable. When the bloom leaves the body he loves, he 'flutters away'[20] and puts all his oaths and promises to shame. But the lover of character is a lover for life, because he's welded to that which is stable.

"Our custom well tests these two types of lover and says, 184
'Gratify this type but shun the other.' It incites the lover to chase, the beloved to flee, that the race may test them and expose which class each belongs to. And it denounces as ugly a loved one's rapid submission. Time should pass, for time tests most things well. Nor must a loved one submit for money or political power, whether beaten into cringing b
submission by cruelty he cannot endure or lured by financial or political favors he fails to despise. We believe that nothing is certain or stable about money and power except their natural inability to engender noble friendship.

"Our custom leaves only one path open for loved ones to gratify lovers. Just as it permits lovers to be the willing slaves of their loved ones in anything without being denounced as c
servile flatterers, so it permits loved ones to perform only one kind of voluntary service that will keep them from being denounced. That is service for excellence. Our custom states that if one person desires to serve another erotically to become a better man through him, either in knowledge or in some other part of excellence, such voluntary slavery is neither servile nor ugly.

"These two customs—the first concerning boy love, the second concerning knowledge and other excellence—must d
both contribute to the same end if gratifying a lover is to turn out well. When lover and loved one, each observing his proper custom, come together for the same end—the lover rightly serving his loved one to gain his permission, the loved one rightly permitting what may be permitted to one that can

[20] **These words** are used of a dream in *Iliad* 2.71.

make him knowing and good—and when the lover can
e provide the intelligence and excellence the loved one needs to get knowledge and education, it is then and only then—at the conjunction of those two customs contributing to a common end—that gratifying a lover turns out beautiful.

"In this situation even getting deceived brings no shame, whereas gratifying a lover for any other motive is ugly
185 whether you're deceived or not. Suppose a boy gratifies a rich lover for money and then gets cheated out of it when the lover is exposed as poor. That's ugly even though the boy was deceived. He has betrayed his true nature—a willingness to do anything for money; and that's not beautiful. But the deception is beautiful if, for the sake of self-improvement, a boy favors a lover who seems good and then finds himself deceived when his lover is exposed as bad and lacking
b excellence. He too has revealed his true nature—eagerness to do anything for anyone for the sake of excellence and becoming a better man; and that's the most beautiful thing there is.

"Thus gratifying lovers for excellence is utterly beautiful. This is the Heavenly Love of the Uranian goddess, valuable to both states and individuals, because he forces the lover and
c loved one each to care for his own excellence. All other loves come from Common Aphrodite. That, Phaedrus," he said, "is my impromptu presentation in praise of Love."

Pausanias paused (I learned to speak jingles like that from the sophists), and Aristodemus said it was Aristophanes' turn. But he had the hiccups from "repletion" or something and couldn't give a speech, so he turned to Eryximachus the doctor, who was reclining beside him, and said: "Eryximachus, if you were a friend, you'd either stop my hiccups or speak in my place until they stop by themselves."

"I shall do both," Eryximachus said. "I'll take your turn and when your indisposition abates you may take mine. As I speak, refrain from breathing awhile and the agitation
e should cease. If not, gargle with water. If they remain violent, tickle your nose with something to induce sneezing. Do that once or twice and they'll relent, no matter how severe they may be."

"Speak," said Aristophanes. "I'll try it."

SPEECH OF ERYXIMACHUS

"Well now, Pausanias seems to have charged into his speech well enough but didn't really end it, so it's up to me to apply a proper ending. I think he made a useful distinction in 186
distinguishing double Love. But I believe one may observe from my science, medicine, that Love operates not only in human souls upon beautiful young men, but in and upon everything—in all living bodies and plants and in practically all that exists: Love is a great and marvelous god whose b
influence extends to all things human and divine.

"I shall begin with medicine, so I may venerate my science as well as the god. Now the nature of the body displays double love. Physical illness and health are admittedly different and unlike, and unlikes desire and love different things. So one kind of love exists in a healthy body, another exists in a sick. As Pausanias just said about people—it is beautiful to gratify good men but ugly to gratify lechers—so also with bodies: it is c
beautiful, even necessary, to gratify the good in each body (such gratification is called medicine), but ugly to gratify the sick and the bad, which we must in fact frustrate to become good technicians. Now medicine, briefly defined, is the science of bodily loves as they pertain to repletion and evacuation, and a man who can diagnose the beautiful love and the ugly will be a good diagnostician, while one who can d
exchange the one for the other and apply love where it is needed and excise it from where it doesn't belong will be a good practitioner. He must also, of course, be able to reconcile the body's hostile elements and cause them to love one another. The most hostile are opposites like the hot and the cold, the wet and the dry, the bitter and the sweet. According to our poets here—[21]and I for one believe them— e
Asclepius, our patron, knew how to apply love and affinity to these opposites and so founded my science.

"This Love, I maintain, charts the whole course of medicine and also of athletics and agriculture. It will be 187
obvious to even a casual observer that the same is true of music, as Heraclitus perhaps tried to say, though he didn't choose his words very well. 'The One,' he says, 'differs from

[21] **I.e., Agathon and Aristophanes.** Asclepius was the god of medicine.

itself and agrees, like the harmony of a lyre and bow.'[22] But it is quite absurd to say that harmony differs from itself or consists of elements which currently differ. Perhaps he was trying to say that a harmony comes from elements which
b previously differed—high and low notes—but which have been brought to agreement by the science of music. It could hardly come from notes that currently differ. A harmony is a concord and a concord an agreement, and you can never have agreement between parties as long as they differ. Nor can you harmonize elements that differ or disagree. So with rhythm: It comes from elements which previously differed—fast and
c slow beats—and which later are made to agree. Here it is music, as before it was medicine, that makes all these opposites agree by introducing love and affinity among them. So music is the science of love as it pertains to harmony and rhythm. In the theoretical constitution of harmony and rhythm the love elements are easy to diagnose and double love doesn't yet come in. But applying rhythm and harmony for
d people's benefit, either by creating music—which is called composition—or by properly performing songs already composed—called education—[23]is difficult and calls for a skilled technician.

"So again the conclusion comes round: We must gratify orderly men and try to make orderly those who are not, preserving their love, which is the beautiful, Heavenly Love
e who comes from the Uranian Muse. Common Love comes from the Muse of popular music, and one must prescribe him cautiously in only small doses so people may enjoy him without catching lechery, just as in my profession one must be careful about diet, so that people may enjoy food without

[22] **Heraclitus** was an early fifth-century philosopher who believed that everything is in flux and strife; the only thing permanent is change. The quotation is abridged by Plato. In full it reads: "It is at variance and yet agrees with itself; there is a back-stretched connection, as in the lyre and bow." This seems to mean that reality exists because of a constant internal tension and strife, just as a bow may be said to exist because of the tension between bow and string. Break the string and you no longer have a bow but only its constituents. Eryximachus gets confused because he takes the word *harmony* in its later musical sense rather than in its earlier sense of "connection," which Heraclitus intended.

[23] **This is not arbitrary;** in Greek "music" also means "education."

harming their health. Thus in music and medicine and all technical skills, human and divine, we must try to preserve, insofar as we can, both of these Loves. For both are in all.

"Even the arrangement of the seasons is filled with both of 188
these Loves, and when the opposites I mentioned earlier encounter orderly Love and attain a temperate, harmonious blending, they come bearing health and good fellowship to men, animals, and crops, and there is justice. But when the insolent Love dominates the seasons, he destroys everything and injustice is unleashed. Such conditions are conducive to b
plagues and other discordant diseases that afflict both animals and crops. Frost, hail, and blight are bred from the disorder and greed of these love forces, the science of which we call astronomy, because it studies the movements of stars and the seasons of the year.

"Finally we come to sacrifice and prophecy—the communion of gods and men—which pertain solely to the c
preservation and cure of Love. All kinds of impiety, toward gods and one's parents, living or dead, tend to occur when people fail in all of their works to honor, gratify, and venerate the orderly Love over the other. So prophecy is the technique charged with the examination and cure of these Loves, as the science of friendship between gods and men, which studies d
those principles of human love that influence piety and righteousness.

"Thus total Love has wide and extensive or, more succinctly, total power, and the Love concerned for the good and consummated with temperance and justice among both us and the gods has the greatest power of all: He provides total happiness and makes us capable of friendship and social intercourse with one another and with those greater than us, the gods.

"Now perhaps in my eulogy I've overlooked much, but it e
wasn't intentional. And it's your task, Aristophanes, to fill in whatever I may have missed. Or if you intend to speak differently, do—your hiccups seem to have stopped."

"Yes," admitted Aristophanes (said Aristodemus), "but not 189
till I gave them the sneeze treatment. I'm amazed that my body's 'orderly love' desires such disgusting noises and gurgles. But it must; they stopped as soon as I sneezed."

"Be careful, my friend," said Eryximahcus. "If you intend to make jokes, you'll force me to censor your speech to make sure you don't try to be funny. So it's up to you if you want to b
be left in peace."

Aristophanes laughed: "You're right, Eryximachus. I take back what I said. Don't watch me; I'm nervous about my speech. Not that I may say something funny—that would be profitable and native to my Muse—but something ridiculous."

"You can't take a cheap shot at me and get away with it, Aristophanes. Watch what you say—I'll hold you
c responsible for it. But if I like your speech, I may let you go."

SPEECH OF ARISTOPHANES

"Yes, Eryximachus, I will speak differently from you and Pausanias. You see, I don't think men realize the power of Love. If they did, they'd make him the fine temples, altars, and sacrifices he deserves, not neglect him as they do. Of all
d the gods Love is the most concerned for our welfare; he is our ally who heals those wounds which, if once cured, would bring mankind perfect happiness. I shall therefore try to initiate you into his power, and you shall go out and teach others.

"First I must teach you about man's nature and its sufferings. Originally our nature was quite different than now. First of all, there were three sexes instead of just two.
e Besides the male and the female there was a third sex that shared in the traits of both of the others. This was once a real sex, but its form disappeared and only its name—hermaphrodite—now remains, as a term of reproach.

"Originally every man was whole, and shaped like a sphere. His chest and back formed a circle, he had four arms,
190 four legs, and one head with two identical faces facing in opposite ways. As you can imagine, his ears numbered four, his genitals two, and so on for the rest. He walked upright like us and could go in either direction. But whenever he was in a hurry, he would throw his arms and his legs straight out from his body, turn cartwheels like an acrobat, and with eight limbs to support him, spin quickly to wherever he wanted to go.

"Here is the reason for the three sexes and the forms that
b they took: The male was descended from the Sun, the female from the Earth, and the sex that shared in both came from the Moon, who shares in both the Sun and the Earth. Original man was spherical and his gait circular like his divine parents. These men had terrible strength and mighty ambitions, so that what Homer says of the Giants Ephialtes

and Otus[24] is said also of them: they attempted to scale heaven and make an attack on the gods.

"Zeus and the other gods held a conference to decide what c
to do. It ended in frustration. They couldn't blast men with lightning, as they had the Giants, and eliminate the race—that would also eliminate the honors and sacrifices that they got from them. But they couldn't tolerate this outrage either.

"Zeus thought long, then had an idea: 'I think I've found a scheme,' he said, 'to foil this nefarious plot and still let men live. We'll cut them in half and kill two birds with one stone: d
They'll be weaker and also more useful to us because there'll be twice as many of them. Let 'em walk on two legs. And if they still don't keep the peace,' he thundered, 'I'll sunder them again, by god, and they can hop around on one leg, like sack-racers!'[25]

"With that Zeus split men the way you cut crab apples for pickling or slice a hard-boiled egg with a hair. As he did, he e
told Apollo to twist their heads around toward the wound so that man would always have to face his cut side and behave in a more orderly way. Then he told him to heal the wounds. So Apollo turned the heads around and then pulled in the skin from all sides toward what we now call the belly, the way you pull in a purse with its drawstrings. He drew it up tight to make a little mouth in the middle and then tied it off. This is what we now call the navel. Then he propped up the chest 191
with ribs and smoothed out the wrinkles, using a tool like shoemakers use to smooth out wrinkles in leather. But he left a few wrinkles around the belly-button as a reminder of our ancient wound.

"After man's nature had been split, each half longed for its other, and they would come together, throw their arms around each other and entwine because they craved to grow back together again. And since each refused to do anything apart from the other, they began to die of starvation and b
general indolence. Whenever one half would die, the survivor would seek out another half and entwine with it, whether it happened to be the half of a whole women—this half is what

[24] **The reference** is to *Odyssey* 11.307-20.

[25] **Literally:** "hop on greased wine skins," a reference to a contest held at a country festival (the "Ascolia"). The contestants apparently had their legs tied together, and the contest was similar to a sack race.

we now call a woman—or of a man. Thus man was becoming extinct.

"But Zeus pitied man and cooked up another scheme: He moved the genitals around to the front. Till then they'd been in the back because they'd been on the outside before, and
c men had conceived not on each other but on the earth, like grasshoppers. But Zeus put the genitals in front and made men conceive on each other, the male on the female, and again killed two birds with one stone: If a man had intercourse with a woman, she'd conceive and perpetuate the race; if with a man, they'd at least be repleted, stop, and go back to work to take care of the other needs of life. It was then that
d man was endowed with mutual Love, the restorer of our original nature who attempts to make one out of two and heal our human condition.

"Thus we're each but the token of a man—cut in half the way parting friends break dice in half so they can recognize each other again by matching the pieces. Each of us is searching for his matching token. Men cut from the common sex—which was then called hermaphrodite—love women.
e Ladies' men and most seducers come from this sex, as do men-hungry women, the *femmes fatales*. Women who come from the original female are lesbians, more interested in women than in men. Men cut from the original male pursue males. As boys they love men and enjoy entwining and sleeping with
192 them because they themselves are slices of the male. These are the best young men, by nature the most masculine. Those who say they are shameless lie. They sleep with men not out of shamelessness but out of boldness, manliness, and courage, because they cherish what resembles themselves. Here is my proof: These are the only boys who grow up fit for politics.
b When such a man comes of age, he becomes a lover of boys, uninterested in marriage and raising a family, which he does only because custom demands it. As one completely devoted to boy love and male companionship, he'd prefer to stay single and live with boys, cherishing his own kind.

"Now when a person, boy lover or anyone else, finds his other half, an amazing love, kinship, and passion seizes them
c and makes them unwilling to part from each other for even a little while. These are the lovers who stay together for life, though even they couldn't say what it is that they want from each other. No one would think it was sex that bound them in such deep and serious joy. Clearly their soul desires

something else, but it can't say what, though it hints at it darkly, in riddles. d

"Suppose while two lovers were lying embraced, Hephaestus[26] should appear to them with his tools and ask: 'What is it, O mortals, you want from each other?' And if they were perplexed he would say: 'Is it this—to be joined so closely that you never shall part by night or by day? If so, I'm here to melt you and weld you together, and make you one out e of two so you may live all your life together as one and die all your death together in Hades as one rather than two. —Well? Is that what you love? Will that satisfy you?'

"We all know that no lover would refuse such an offer. He'd believe he had heard just what he had always desired: to melt and merge with his loved one and become one out of two. This is because our original nature was one and we were whole. Our name for this desire and pursuit after wholeness is 'love.'

"Originally, I say, we were one, but because of our injustice 193 the gods dispersed and resettled us, as the Spartans did the Arcadians. And if we don't behave in an orderly way, we must fear that the gods may cut us in half again and make us run around like relief figures carved on monuments—split down the middle through the nose, like fish fillets. Therefore every man must exhort every other to show reverence toward the gods; that we may avoid such a fate, and with Love as our b leader and guide, attain what we truly desire. Let no man, therefore, act contrary to Love—he does so who angers the gods—but let us make up with him and be friends and so find our own proper loved ones, which is a thing that now happens to only a few.

"I hope Eryximachus doesn't make fun of my speech and accuse me of referring to Pausanias and Agathon. Perhaps they are slices of the male and naturally masculine. But I refer c to all men and all women when I say that the whole human race will be happy if each of us consummates his love by finding his loved one and returning with him to our original condition. If this is the best condition, then whichever of us has come the closest to it—by finding the loved one who matches his nature—must be the best of us all. And if we would praise the god who is the cause of this boon, we will justly sing paeans to Love, who for the present performs a d

[26] **The blacksmith god.**

great service by bringing us together with our own and who holds out for the future the greatest hope that if we show reverence toward the gods, he will heal our ancient wounds, restore our pristine nature, and so make us blessed and happy again.

"That, Eryximachus, is my speech about Love—different from yours. Please don't make fun of it, so we can hear what the others will say. I guess I should say 'the other two,'
e because only Agathon and Socrates are left."

"Oh, I shan't," Eryximachus assured him (said Aristodemus). "I found it quite pleasant. If I weren't aware that Socrates and Agathon are experts on love, I'd be terribly anxious for them after hearing so many different speeches on the subject. But as it is, I'm quite optimistic."

194 "You competed very well yourself, Eryximachus," said Socrates (according to Aristodemus). "But if you were in my place, or rather in the place I'll undoubtedly be after Agathon has made his beautiful speech, you'd be as helpless and terrified as I am."

"Socrates," said Agathon, "you're trying to jinx me by making me think my audience has great expectations of me as a clever speaker."

"I saw your proud self-assurance the other day, Agathon, as
b you mounted the stage with your actors. You looked out over that huge crowd before you presented your play and didn't show the least sign of nervousness. After seeing that, I'd be pretty forgetful if I thought you'd be upset now in front of our little group."

"Do you think I'm so stage-struck that I don't even know a small audience of intellectuals is more frightening to a sensible man than a crowd of fools?"

c "I'm sure I'd be making a mistake if I thought you at all unsophisticated, Agathon. I know if you found some people you thought clever, you'd care more about them than about the crowd. But that leaves us out, I'm afraid: we were there the other day and were part of the crowd. But if you found some others who were clever, you'd probably feel ashamed around them if you did something that you thought was shameful. Isn't that so?"

"Yes," replied Agathon (said Aristodemus).

"But you wouldn't be ashamed around the crowd if you did something that you thought was shameful?"

d But Phaedrus, Aristodemus said, interrupted them: "Don't

answer him, Agathon. If you do, he won't care about anything as long as he has someone to talk to—especially if that someone is handsome. I enjoy listening to Socrates' discussions, but I have to look after the Love speeches and make sure I get one from each of you. So each give a speech and then you can have a discussion."

"You're right, Phaedrus," said Agathon, "—nothing will e
stop me. There'll be plenty of opportunities later for discussions with Socrates."

SPEECH OF AGATHON

"First I shall seek to tell how to speak and then speak. Of the previous speakers none, it seems, celebrated the god but felicitated man for the goods of which the god is the cause. But what sort is the god who confers all those gifts no one has said. There's but one right way to make any eulogy on any 195
subject: to expound in a speech what sort of cause of what sort of effects the subject of that eulogy is. So with Love: It's right to praise him first as he is, then his gifts.

"Of all the happy gods, I say—may divine Right and Wrath permit me to say!—the happiest is Love, being most beautiful and best. He is most beautiful thus: First, Phaedrus, he is youngest of all. Of this he himself provides fairest proof, b
by fleeing in fear from old age—a very fast thing, it is clear, since it comes upon us quicker than it ought. Love by nature hates old age and comes not within its reach. But with the young he consorts and ever resorts. And it was truly said of old: Like ever consorts with its like.

"Though agreeing with Phaedrus in much, here I do not. Love's not older than Cronus and Iapetus,[27] but youngest, say I, of the gods, and remains ever so. The old horrors told of the c
gods by Hesiod and Parmenides, if they speak true, occurred not under Love but Necessity. The gods would never have chained or castrated each other or done those other violent deeds, had Love been with them. Peace and friendship had reigned, as now, since Love has ruled as their king.

"Young then he is, and gentle. It would take a poet like Homer to reveal this god's gentleness. Homer calls Ruin a d

[27] **Both Titans** or elder gods. Cronus castrated his father Uranus and seized control of the universe, and Zeus in turn deposed Cronus (his father) and chained him in Tartarus. These are the "horrors" mentioned below.

goddess and gentle—gentle at least in her feet: 'And gentle her feet; for not o'er the glebe/does she glide, but treads on the heads of men.'[28] A beautiful proof this would seem of Ruin's gentleness, who treads not on the rough but the soft. The
e same proof may suffice to show Love as gentle. For he treads not upon earth nor even on heads—which are not very soft—but in the softest of the soft he treads as well as dwells. In the dispositions and souls of gods and men he founds his abode, though not in all without discrimination; should he find a soul with a rough disposition he leaves; if soft, he settles. And clinging always in all ways to the softest of the soft, he must himself be the gentlest of the gentle.

196 "Youngest he is then and gentlest, and also flowing of form. He cannot be rigid or stiff, else he could never enwrap in all ways, slipping in and out through every soul unheeded. His flowing and well-proportioned form is evidenced by his gracefulness, a quality universally granted, since eternal strife persists between awkwardness and Love.

"His habit of inhabiting flowers signals the god's fair
b complexion. He lights not in a soul, a body, or anything bloomless or faded, but in a fragrant and flowering place he settles to stay.

"As for his beauty, that must suffice, though much has been left unsaid. I must now pass on to his virtues. Chiefest of these is justice: Love, in his dealings with gods and men, neither wrongs nor is wronged in return. Passive, he's not
c passive by force—force may never touch Love—and active, all actively serve Love by consent, and what consenting parties consentingly do—that, says our law, the 'state's sovereign,'[29] is just.

"Besides being just, Love is aboundingly temperate. Temperance admittedly means mastery of desires and pleasures, than which none is stronger than Love. If stronger, the others, weaker, are mastered by Love; if mastered, Love must master, perforce, all desires and pleasures and so be immoderately temperate.

"Love has such courage as 'not even Ares can withstand.'[30]
d For Ares possesses not Love, but Love Ares—love of

[28] **The quotation** is from *Iliad* 19.92-93.

[29] **Quoted from** Alcidamas, a pupil of Gorgias.

[30] **From the** *Thyestes*, a lost play by Sophocles. Ares is the god of war, in the *Odyssey* the lover of Aphrodite.

Aphrodite, so the story goes—and the possessor is more powerful than the possessed. And he who overpowers the most courageous god must be most courageous of all.

"I've spoken of Love's justice, temperance, and courage; his wisdom remains. I shall repair this liability to the best of my ability. First, to honor my craft as Eryximachus did his, Love is so wise a poet as to make poets of others. Whoever e
Love touches turns poet, 'be he ever so museless before.'[31] This may pass as proof that Love is a great poet in all production pertaining to the Muse. For what one neither knows nor possesses can be neither given nor taught to another. Touching the creation of all living creatures, who would contest it's the wisdom of Love which causes the birth 197
and the growth of all living things? In the practice of crafts we agree that the man who has this god for a teacher will turn out brilliant and famous, but who the god touches not shall be dark and obscure. Apollo under the guidance of Love invented archery, prophecy, therapy; thus even he must be a disciple of Love. So in music the Muses, Hephaestus in b
smithing, Athena in weaving, and Zeus in the 'steering of gods and men.' Hence the affairs of the gods were arranged after Love had been born—love of beauty, it's clear, since Love does not pair with the ugly. Before that, as I said at the start, many are the horrors said to have happened amongst them, under Necessity's rule. But since this god came to be, love of beauty has engendered all manner of good among gods and men.

"Thus, Phaedrus, I hold that Love is first fairest and best, c
then the cause of like effects in others. I'm moved to speak verse and proclaim it is he who makes

> Peace among mortals, the hushed calm on the deep,
> stillness of winds, and in sorrow sweet sleep.[32]

Love brings us to brotherhood, flings us from otherhood, all d
unions uniting like this, joining us one to the other, leading our sacrifices, dances, and feasts. All mildness providing, all wildness deriding, toward benevolence beneficent, toward malevolence maleficent, cheerful and good. To the wise he appears, all gods he endears. By the unfortunate he is pursued, the fortunate by him are imbued. Father of delicacy,

[31] **An allusion** to a line from the *Stheneboea*, a lost play of Euripides.
[32] **An echo of** *Odyssey* 5.391.

luxury, effeminacy, the Graces, desire, longing, and need. For the good he's concerned, all evil he's spurned. In longing
e and pain, in speaking and strain, our pilot, companion, best savior, and friend; brightest adornment of gods and of men, our fairest leader and best, whom all ought to follow exalting in fair-sounding song, taking part in that hymn by which he bewitches the mind of gods and of men.

"That is my speech, Phaedrus, dedicated to the god and partaking, in so far as I could make it, equally of playfulness and restrained seriousness."

198 When Agathon had finished, Aristodemus said they all cheered wildly because the young man's speech had been so appropriate to both himself and the god.

Socrates looked at Eryximachus: "Son of Acumenus," he said, "do you still feel I felt a futile fear before, or was I a prophet when I said Agathon would give an amazing speech and I'd be at a loss for words?"

"I think you prophesied one thing truly: that Agathon would make a fine speech. As for your being at a loss—I doubt it," replied Eryximachus (said Aristodemus).

b "My friend," said Socrates, "how could anyone not be at a loss if he had to follow such a fair and many-sided speech as that? Perhaps the earlier parts weren't so amazing, but that ending! Who could have listened to that gorgeous diction and phrasing without being smitten? When I reflected that I wouldn't be able to come anywhere near such gorgeousness, I was tempted to sneak away for shame, but there was no place
c to go. It reminded me so much of Gorgias[33] that I felt like the man in Homer: I was afraid at the end that Agathon would throw the Gorgon's head of Gorgias, gorged with garrulity, into my speech and turn me to stone with speechlessness. I realized that it had been idiotic of me to agree to take a turn at
d praising Love and to claim I was an expert when it turns out that I don't even know how to make a eulogy. In my stupidity, you see, I thought all you had to do was tell the truth about the subject and, once that had been established, select the most beautiful facts and arrange them as fittingly as possible.

[33] **The most famous** sophist and orator of the time. His style, characterized by short, balanced clauses, jingles, and other ear ticklers, is parodied in the ending of Agathon's speech. The pun on the Gorgon below refers to the monster whose look turned men to stone, *Odyssey* 11.634-35.

I was actually quite smug about my ability to make a good speech because I thought I knew the right way to do it.

"Now it turns out that that isn't the right way at all. The right way, it seems, is to give your subject the most beautiful e
attributes you can think of, whether it has them or not. If they're false, that doesn't make any difference. It seems the proposal was not to eulogize Love, but to appear to. I assume that's why you exploited every conceivable argument to attribute to Love, saying he is so and so and the cause of such 199
and such: to make him appear as good and as beautiful as possible to people who don't know him—hardly to people who do!—and to make your speeches beautiful and grand.

"But I don't understand that method of making a eulogy, and it was out of ignorance that I agreed to make one. 'My tongue, not my heart, made the promise,'[34] and so I must break it. I won't give a eulogy like that—I couldn't do it. But I am willing to tell the truth, if you'd like, in my own way—not b
in competition with your speeches, because that would make me look like a fool. So, Phaedrus, see if you can use a plain speech that tells the truth about Love, presented only with such diction and phrasing as occurs to me as I speak."

Phaedrus and the others, Aristodemus said, told Socrates to go ahead and speak in any way he thought proper.

"Now, Phaedrus," Socrates said, "please let me ask Agathon a few little questions so I can start speaking from a point we've agreed on."

"Go ahead," said Phaedrus. Then, said Aristodemus, c
Socrates began something like this:

"Agathon, my friend, I thought you opened your speech very well when you said we should show first what Love is like and then his functions. I really liked that opening. Now, since you did such a marvelous job of describing his other qualities, tell me about this one too: Is Love the love *of* d
something or not? By that I don't mean is he the love of a mother, for instance, or of a father—that would be a ridiculous question.[35] But if I asked, 'Is a father the father *of* someone or not?' I suppose if you wanted to give the right

[34] **Euripides,** *Hippolytus* 612. This notorious line, parodied by Aristophanes in his comedies, seemed to sanction perjury as long as you had "your finger crossed."

[35] *Eros* is passionate, sexual love; therefore the question is ridiculous when applied to a parent.

answer, you'd say he's the father of a son or a daughter. Isn't that true?"

"Of course," said Agathon.

"The same for a mother?"

Agathon agreed, said Aristodemus.

e "All right," said Socrates, "answer a few more questions so you'll see what I'm after. Suppose I asked: 'What about brother? Does that in itself imply a brother *of* someone?'"

Agathon said it did, said Aristodemus.

"Of a brother or sister, right?"

Agathon agreed, he said.

"Now try to answer my original question: Is Love the love *of* something or not?"

"He certainly is."

200 "Remember that answer," said Socrates, "—and also what you said the object of Love is. Now tell me, does Love *desire* what he's the love of or not?"

"Certainly," he said.

"Does he *possess* what he desires and loves and still desire and love it, or not?"

"Probably not."

"Probably or necessarily? To me it seems astonishingly b clear, Agathon, that desire necessarily lacks what it desires and that without lack there can be no desire. How about you?"

"It seems necessary to me too."

"Well said, Agathon. Would someone tall desire to be tall, or someone strong to be strong?"

"That's impossible from what we've agreed on."

"Because he wouldn't lack the qualities he has."

"Right," replied Agathon (said Aristodemus).

"If someone strong wished to be strong, or someone fast to be fast, or someone healthy to be healthy—I'm harping on c this so we won't be misled, because a person might think that someone who had these qualities could also desire them. But if you think about it, Agathon, a person must already possess each quality he has whether he wants to or not. And who would desire something like that? So if a man were to say: 'I'm healthy and I also wish to be healthy, I'm rich and I want to be rich, and I desire precisely the things that I have,' we'd reply, d 'My friend, you already have health, wealth, and strength, so what you must want is to continue to possess them in the future, since for the present you already have them whether

you want them or not. So when you say you desire what you already have, don't you really mean, "I wish to possess in the future the things I have right now"?'—wouldn't he agree that this is so?"

"Yes," said Agathon.

"Then that means he loves what is not yet possessed or available: the preservation and continuance of present things into the future."

"Indeed." e

"So our friend and everyone else who desires, desires what is not present or available; and the objects of love and desire are things lacking, not part of oneself, and not possessed."

"True."

"Let's sum up our conclusions then: Love is first the love *of* things, then of things he now lacks. Isn't that so?"

"Yes." 201

"Now recall what you said in your speech is the object of Love. If you like, I'll recall it for you. I believe you said something like this: The affairs of the gods were arranged through love of beauty; there can be no love of the ugly. Didn't you say something like that?"

"Yes," said Agathon.

"And a most suitable speech it was too. But if that's true, can Love be anything except the love of beauty?"

"No."

"Didn't we agree that he lacks what he loves and doesn't b have it?"

"Yes."

"So Love must lack beauty and not have it."

"That follows."

"Very interesting. Do you really maintain that something which lacks beauty and never has it is beautiful?"

"No."

"Then do you still say that Love is beautiful?"

And Agathon said: "I'm afraid I didn't know what I was talking about when I said that."

"But your speech was so beautiful, Agathon. Now one c more question: Do you think that whatever is beautiful is also good?"

"Yes, I do," Aristodemus said Agathon replied.

"Therefore if Love lacks beautiful things, and if beautiful things are good, then Love must also lack good things."

"Have it your way, Socrates. I can't contradict you."

"It must be the truth you can't contradict, beloved

Agathon," said Socrates—"you could contradict Socrates easily."

SPEECH OF SOCRATES

d "I'll leave you alone now, Agathon. The speech I'm about to give is one that I once heard from a Mantinean[36] lady named Diotima, who was very wise in many ways—once when the Athenians were sacrificing to avert the plague she postponed it for ten years—and she taught me all about Love. It is her speech, then, that I shall relate as well as I can all by myself, starting from the points Agathon and I agreed on.

"Agathon, you were right to say that we should expound
e first what Love is and is like, and then his functions. And the easiest way for me to do that, I think, is to go through the same questions and answers the lady once went through with me. In different words I said much the same thing to her as Agathon said to me just now: that Love is a great god whose object is beauty. And she refuted me with the arguments I just used, pointing out that by my own reasoning Love was neither beautiful nor good.

'Do you mean to say he's ugly and bad?' I said.

'Hush!' she said. 'Do you think whatever isn't beautiful must necessarily be ugly?'

202 'Absolutely,' I said.

'And whoever isn't wise is ignorant? Or do you see that there's something between wisdom and ignorance?'

'What could that be?'

'Holding right opinions without being able to give reasons for them. You surely don't think something unreasoned is knowledge, do you? And stumbling onto reality isn't ignorance either. So I suppose this thing between knowledge and ignorance ought to be called "right opinion."'

'True,' I said.

b 'Then don't go forcing something not beautiful to be ugly or something not good to be bad. Just because you admit that Love is neither good nor beautiful, don't think he has to be ugly and bad—he's really between them.'

'But everyone says he's a great god.'

'Everyone ignorant, you mean? Or also people who know?'

'I mean everyone.'

[36] **Mantinea was** a town in the Peloponnese. Diotima is probably an invented character.

"She laughed and said: 'Socrates, how can everyone say he's a great god when there are people who say he's not even a god?' c

'Who says that?' I asked.

'One,' she said, 'is you; another is me.'

'Diotima—how can you say that?'

'Easy. Look, do you call all gods beautiful and happy? Or would you dare to say there's one who isn't?'

'Heavens, no! I'd never say something like that.'

'By happy do you mean those who have good and beautiful things?'

'Certainly,' I said.

'But you just admitted that Love desires good and beautiful d things precisely because he lacks them.'

'Yes, I did admit that.'

'Then how can he be a god if he lacks good and beautiful things?'

'He can't, I guess.'

'See? Even you don't believe that Love is a god.'

'Then what is he? A mortal?'

'No.'

'Well, what then?'

'Just as we said before: something between.'

'What can that be, Diotima?'

'A great spirit, Socrates. The whole spirit world, in fact, lies between the mortal and the divine.' e

'What is its function?'

'To convey and interpret things from men to gods and from gods to men: requests and sacrifices from men, commands and returns for sacrifices from the gods. Being in the middle, the spirit world fills both worlds and binds the all to itself. Through the spirit world passes divination and the sacred sciences concerned with sacrifices, initiations, spells, all kinds of magic, and wizardry. Gods don't mingle with men; 203 all communication and intercourse between us, sleeping or awake, takes place through the spirit world. A man versed in such things is a spiritual man; one versed in anything else, whether a science or a trade, is merely a technician. There are a vast number and variety of spirits, Socrates, and one of them is Love.'

'Who are his mother and father?' I asked.

'That's a long story,' she said, 'but I'll tell it to you anyway. b When Aphrodite was born, the gods held a feast. Among

them was Resource, the son of Cunning. They had just finished a lavish meal when Poverty came begging at the door. Now, Resource had gotten drunk on the nectar—wine hadn't been invented yet—gone out into Zeus's garden, and fallen asleep in a stupor. Because of her resourcelessness, Poverty plotted to have a child by Resource, lay with him, and
c conceived Love. That's why Love became a servant and follower of Aphrodite: He was conceived at her birthday feast and is by nature a lover of beauty, and Aphrodite is very beautiful.

'As the son of Resource and Poverty, this is Love's plight: First, he's always a pauper, and far from being gentle and fair, as the crowd imagines, he's stiff and rough, shoeless and
d homeless, forever living in squalor and sleeping without a bed—outdoors on the ground, in streets, or on doorsteps. Having his mother's nature, he always cohabits with Need.

'Like his father, however, Love is a schemer after the beautiful and the good, an intrepid hunter full of courage, boldness, and endurance. He's forever hatching plots, and since he's resourceful and hungry for knowledge, he's a confirmed philosopher, a sorcerer and brewer of potions, and a skilled sophist. By nature he's neither mortal nor immortal,
e but when things go well for him, he'll come to life and flourish in a day, then die, then revive again. That's because of the resourcefulness he inherits from his father. But what his resourcefulness contrives always slips away from him, and he's never rich or poor for long because he's in the middle, between wisdom and ignorance.

204 'It's like this, you see. No god is a philosopher or desires to be wise. He *is* wise, and if there's anyone else who is wise, he's no philosopher either. So with ignorant people: They aren't philosophers and they don't desire wisdom. That's exactly why ignorance is so hard to deal with: An ignorant person is neither good nor intelligent, yet he's satisfied with himself because he can't desire what he doesn't think he lacks.'

'Then who are the philosophers,' I asked, 'if they're neither the wise nor the ignorant?'

b 'By now that should be obvious even to a child, Socrates. They're the ones in between, like Love. Wisdom, of course, is extremely beautiful, and since Love loves beauty, he must also love wisdom and be a philosopher, someone halfway between wisdom and ignorance. Love's heredity accounts for that also because his father was wise and resourceful, his mother unwise and resourceless.

'So much for the spirit's nature, dear Socrates. Your notion of Love was just a mistake, and not a very surprising one either. Judging by your statements, I'd say you mistook Love c to be Love's object rather than its loving force. I suppose that's why Love appeared so beautiful to you—love's object really is beautiful and delicate, blessed and perfect. But its loving force has an entirely different form, as I've explained.'

'Well, dear lady, you surely are a fine speaker. But if that's what Love is like, what use is he to man?'

'That's the next thing I'll have to try to teach you, Socrates. d You now know Love's nature and parentage, and his object is beauty, as you said. Now, what if someone asked us: "Why is Love of beauty, Socrates and Diotima?" or more clearly: "A lover loves beautiful things. Why?"'

'To get them,' I said.

'But that reply demands a further question: What does one gain by acquiring beautiful things?'

'I don't really seem to have an answer to that.'

'Well, suppose he exchanged goodness for beauty and said: e "All right, Socrates, a lover loves good things. Why?"'

'To get them,' I said.

'And what does one gain by acquiring good things?'

'I do have an answer to that: happiness.'

'Because having good things is what makes happy people 205 happy, and we don't have to ask, "Why does a person want to be happy?" The answer seems to be final.'

'That's true,' I said.

'Do you think this want and this love are common to all men and everyone always wants to have good things?'

'I think so.'

'Then why don't we call them all lovers? Why some and not b others?'

'I'm surprised at that myself,' I said.

'It's not so surprising,' she said. 'You see, we abstract one form of love and give it the name of the whole. The other forms are called by different names.'"

'How do you mean?'

'Well, consider this: You know that creation is a broad thing. It's the sole cause of the emergence of anything from non-existence to existence, so that the production of things by c any craft is creation, and all craftsmen are creators.'

'True.'

'And yet you also know they aren't called creators, but have different names. Out of all creativity one part has been

abstracted—the creation of music and poetry—and given the name of the whole. These are the only things called creation, and people with that kind of creativity are the only ones called creators.'

'True.'

d 'Well, the same with Love. Briefly put, all desire for happiness and good things is the prodigious, crafty love in us all. But people given to any other kind of love—such as love of money, sports, or knowledge—aren't called lovers or in love. Only those eagerly bent on pursuing one particular form of love are called lovers from the name of the whole.'

'I'll bet you're right,' I said.

'There's a story going around that love means searching for
e your own half. But I contend that love is neither of one's half nor of one's whole—unless, of course, it happened to be good—since a man would be willing to cut off his own hand or foot if he thought it was no good. So, my friend, I don't think we each cherish our own, unless you define the good as your own and the bad as the alien. Because what a man loves
206 is nothing other than the good. Or do you think differently?'

'No, by Zeus, I don't.'

'Well, can we simply say that men love the good?'

'Yes.'

'Wait a minute—shouldn't we add that they love to *possess* the good?'

'Yes, we should.'

'And not just to possess it, but to possess it forever?'

'Yes, we should add that too.'

'Love then, to define it succinctly, is the love of possessing the good forever.'

'That's perfectly true,' I said.

b 'Then what kind of pursuit of the good ought to be called love, and in what kind of activity is this eager intensity displayed? What is Love's function? Can you tell me?'

'If I could, Diotima, I wouldn't marvel at your wisdom and keep coming back to you to learn these very things.'

'Then I'll tell you: Love's function is reproduction in the beautiful, both in body and in soul.'

'Diotima, it would take prophecy to figure that out, and I don't have it.'

c 'But I have,' she said, 'a way to make this clear to you. You see, Socrates, all men are pregnant in both body and soul, and when we reach a certain age, our nature desires to give birth.

But birth isn't possible in the ugly, only in the beautiful. The intercourse of man and woman is procreation. This is a divine thing, for pregnancy and birth are what is deathless in creatures that die. But pregnancy and birth cannot take place in discord, and ugliness is discordant with the divine, d
whereas beauty is concordant. Therefore Beauty is the goddess of birth. That's why when Pregnancy approaches beauty it feels cheerful and light-hearted; it relaxes and easily gives birth. Near ugliness, however, it frowns in pain, tenses and contracts in avoidance and revulsion, and doesn't give birth but painfully bears a withered, stillborn fetus. Hence the extreme excitement for beauty in someone who's e
pregnant: it's a release from the terrible pangs of labor. For Love, Socrates, is not the love of beauty, as you think.'

'What is it then?'

'Love of reproduction and procreation in the beautiful.'

'Oh.'

'Absolutely,' she said. 'And why of procreation? Because that's as close as a mortal can come to perpetuity and 207
immortality. And if what we've said is true—that Love is the love of possessing the good *forever*—then we must desire immortality as well as the good. So Love is necessarily the love of immortality as well as of the good.'

"That's what Diotima used to teach me whenever she spoke about Love, and once she asked: 'Socrates, what do you suppose is the cause of all this love and desire? Or haven't you ever noticed the terrible state that birds and animals get into when they desire to reproduce? They fall sick with love, first b
in regard to mating, then in regard to rearing their young. The weakest creatures will fight the strongest and even die for the sake of the young; they go hungry to feed them, and they make any sacrifice they must. You might think men acted this way out of calculation, but what can be the cause of such behavior in animals? Can you tell me?' c

"I said I didn't know.

"She replied: 'How on earth do you expect to become an expert on love if you can't even figure that out?'

'But Diotima, I just said that's exactly why I come to you, because I realize I need a teacher. So tell me the reason for this and for everything else about love.'

'Well, Socrates, if you really believe that the natural object of love is what we've so often said, don't be surprised at the conclusion, which is the same for animals as for men: It's the d

nature of mortality to strive to exist forever and be immortal. And it can do so only through reproduction, so that a new, different individual always replaces the old. Even the individual, though each creature is said to be the same throughout its life—as a man, for example, is called the same man from youth to old age—nevertheless, he never has the same attributes. He is constantly being renewed, and old attributes are being destroyed. So with hair, flesh, bones,
e blood, the whole body and even the soul: A man's personality, habits, opinions, desires, pleasures, pains, fears—none stay the same, but new ones come into being as the old die away.

'Knowledge is even stranger: We're never the same even in
208 what we know, not only because new knowledge comes into being and old knowledge passes away, but also because each bit of knowledge suffers the same thing that we do. What we call "practice," or "reviewing," exists because knowledge departs. Forgetting is the departure of knowledge; reviewing preserves knowledge by implanting a fresh, seemingly identical memory to replace a departing one. All mortal creatures are preserved the same way: not by remaining exactly the same forever like a god, but by each aging and
b departing individual always leaving behind a new, different one like himself. That's the device, Socrates, by which mortals partake of immortality, physically and otherwise. Immortals have their own way. So don't be surprised if every creature naturally respects its own offspring. It's for the sake of immortality that this love and eagerness accompanies them all.'

"I was amazed and said: 'Wise Diotima, is that really true?'

c "Like an accomplished professor she replied: 'Irrefutably. Consider, if you will, human ambition as an illustration of my point. Unless you bear in mind what I've said, you'll be astounded at the irrationality of man's terrible erotic drive "to achieve fame and immortal renown for all future time." A man will risk greater dangers to win fame than to protect his
d children—he'll squander his wealth, endure hardships, even sacrifice his life. Do you think Alcestis would have died for Admetus, Achilles followed Patroclus into death, or your own king Codrus[37] willingly have died before his time to keep

[37] **An early king** of Athens. When Dorians were invading the city an oracle proclaimed that it would fall unless Codrus were killed. He

the throne for his family if they hadn't all believed that the memory we still have of their excellence would be immortal? Far from it, Socrates. I hold that all men do all things for the sake of immortal excellence and a glorious reputation like theirs, and the better the man, the more he does. For men love e
immortality.

'Men pregnant in body go to women to express their love, hoping in that way to provide an immortal memory for themselves and happiness for all future time. But those pregnant in soul—there are some,' she said, 'more pregnant 209
in soul than in body, who conceive and give birth to the things of the mind, such as knowledge and excellence of the type that poets and inventors beget. By far the highest, most beautiful knowledge is called temperance and justice, which concern the administration of states and of private affairs.

'Such a young man, divine and since childhood pregnant in soul, desires to give birth when he comes of age and so goes b
looking for beauty, since he cannot give birth in the ugly. Being pregnant, he cherishes beautiful bodies, and if he finds one whose soul is also beautiful, graceful, and noble, he rejoices in the combination and teems with resource in conversation about excellence and the qualities and activities c
appropriate to the good man, and tries to teach this one.

'By attaching himself to a beautiful person and associating with him, he brings forth what he has carried so long, and present and absent he thinks of his friend and brings up his progeny with him, so that such lovers have a far stronger intimacy than ordinary parents because the children they share are more beautiful and also immortal. Everyone would prefer such offspring to human children and, looking at d
Homer, Hesiod, and the other great poets, envy them the progeny they left behind, who have brought them an eternal memory and immortal fame. Or you may prefer children such as Lycurgus the lawgiver[38] left as saviors of Sparta and of practically all of Greece. At Athens, Solon is also honored for begetting the laws, as are countless other men elsewhere in e

therefore slipped out in disguise, quarreled with some Dorian soldiers and got himself killed, thus saving the city and the throne for his descendants.

[38] **The traditional** founder of the Spartan constitution and framer of her laws. Solon, below, was an early lawgiver of Athens and a founder of her democracy.

Greece and in foreign countries, for causing beautiful works to appear by giving birth to every kind of excellence. Some of these men are honored like gods for their progeny, but no one has ever been so honored for human children.

'So far, Socrates, the mysteries have been like a path which,
210 if followed correctly, leads to the final revelations. Perhaps even you may be initiated this far. The rest, I'm afraid, will be completely beyond you. Still, I'll reveal it—I won't lack enthusiasm. So try to follow, if you can.

'A man who would approach love properly must begin as a child and go to beautiful bodies and first, if his guide directs him properly, love one beautiful body and in it bring forth beautiful words and ideas; next he must notice that the beauty
b of any one body is akin to that of all others, so that if one must pursue beauty of form, it is absurd not to regard the beauty of all bodies as one and the same. He has now become a lover of all beautiful bodies; his violent excitement for one abates, and he begins to despise it as petty. The next step is to honor spiritual beauty above physical beauty, so that if he finds a
c man good in soul without a blossoming body, he'll be satisfied, love and care for him, and, by giving birth to the kind of discussions that improve a young man, be forced to observe the beauty of laws and customs, to see once again that all beauty is kindred and so conclude that physical beauty is only a paltry thing.

'After customs he must be led to knowledge and see its beauty also, so that, having by now looked upon much
d beauty, he'll no longer admire a particular manifestation of it—fawning on an individual person, sweetheart, or custom like a worthless, small-minded slave—but rather, absorbed in the contemplation of a vast sea of beauty, give birth to sublime words and sentiments in the unstinting practice of philosophy until, having thus grown in power, he may glimpse a unique knowledge—of a beauty I shall now
e describe. So try to pay attention, as well as you possibly can.

'A man brought so far in love through the contemplation of beautiful things viewed in their proper sequence will, toward the end of his education, suddenly see something by nature astonishingly beautiful. This, Socrates, is the goal of
211 all his previous struggles. First, it always *is*, and neither comes into being and passes away nor increases and declines; secondly, it is not beautiful in part, ugly in part, or now the one, now the other; not beautiful compared to this, ugly

compared to that, nor yet beautiful here but ugly there, so as to appear beautiful to some but ugly to others. Its beauty does not give the illusion of being the beauty of a face, hands, or of anything the body partakes of, or of speech or a knowledge; nor is it *in* something else, as in an animal, the earth, the sky, or in any other thing. It is instead the beautiful itself as it b always *is*, one of a kind, by itself with itself; and all other beautiful things partake of that beautiful itself in such a way that their own coming to be and passing away neither increases it, diminishes it, nor affects it in any way.

'When, by proper boy love, a man ascends from things here and begins to glimpse the beautiful over there, he has almost reached the final goal. This is the proper way to go or be led to Love: to begin from beautiful things and ever climb, as on a c ladder, from one beautiful body to two and from two to all, from bodies to beautiful customs, from customs to beautiful knowledge, and from knowledge finally to reach that knowledge which is none other than the revelation of the beautiful itself, and so recognize at last what beauty really is.'

'That, dear Socrates,' said the Mantinean lady, 'is the time, d if ever there is one, when life is worth living—spent in contemplating the beautiful itself. If you should ever see that, Socrates, it won't seem to you to compare with the beauty of gold or of clothing or of boys and young men, whose beauty now so smites you—and others too—that you'd abstain from food and drink if you could and spend all your time watching the boys and consorting only with them. What then do you think would happen if a man could see pure beauty itself, clean and undefiled; if he caught a glimpse of it as it is, not e contaminated by human flesh or color or any other corruptible trash, but simple, divine beauty itself? Do you think life would be worthless then, when a man could look 212 over there with the proper faculty[39] and contemplate and consort with the beautiful? Don't you realize that it's only then, when he sees the beautiful itself with the faculty able to see it, that a man will bear not phantoms of excellence—since it's no phantom he clings to—but true excellence, because he clings to the truth? That in bearing and rearing true excellence this man, if any, will become god-beloved and immortal?'

[39] **I.e., reason or mind.** Cf. *Phaedrus* 247c (in a similar context): "Visible only to the soul's pilot, mind."

b "That, Phaedrus and gentlemen, is what Diotima said, and I believe her. And because I believe her, I try to convince others that our human nature could not easily find a better partner than Love to help us attain that possession. Therefore I say that all men should honor Love, as I honor him and distinctively practice his ways, and I exhort others to do so, and now as always I glorify Love's power and courage with all the strength that I have.

c "That is my speech, Phaedrus. Accept it, if you will, as a proper eulogy to Love. If not, then call it whatever you like."

When Socrates had finished, said Aristodemus, they all congratulated him except Aristophanes, who was trying to say something about the reference to his "story." Suddenly there was a terrific racket at the outside door. He said it sounded like revelers, and they could hear a flute girl playing. Agathon told the boys to go see who it was: "If it's some of our

d friends, let them in. If not, say the party is over and we're going to bed."

Moments later, said Aristodemus, they heard Alcibiades shouting drunkenly in the yard: "Where's Agathon? Take me to Agathon!" The flute girl and some others half-carried him

e in. There he stood in the doorway with a bushy wreath of violets and ivy on his head, and lots of ribbons. "Joy, gentlemen!" he cried. "Can I join the party roaring drunk, or should we just do what we came for—wreathe Agathon—and go? I couldn't come last night, you know, but I'm here now, with ribbons on my head to take from my head and put on the wisest and beautifullest head in town, if I may say so, like this. Will you laugh at me because I'm drunk? Well, I don't care—I

213 know I'm telling the truth. So out with it: Can I join you on these terms? Will you drink with me or not?"

They all cheered, Aristodemus said, and told Alcibiades to come in and take a seat, and Agathon invited him in too. So in he came, led by his crew. He was undoing the ribbons as he entered and didn't notice Socrates because the ribbons were in front of his eyes. He sat down right next to Agathon, between

b him and Socrates, who had moved over when he saw him. He gave Agathon a hug and tied the ribbons on his head.

"Boys," said Agathon, "take off Alcibiades' shoes so he may recline as the third on this couch."

"Please do," said Alcibiades. "But who's the third?" As he spoke he turned around and saw Socrates. Up he leapt, exclaiming, "Heracles! What's this? Socrates! What are you

doing here? You were lurking here to ambush me, popping c
up as usual where I least expected you. Why are *you* here? And
why are you *here,* next to Agathon? You never sit by
Aristophanes or some other clown, do you? Oh no, leave it to
you to finagle a seat next to the handsomest man in the
house!"

"Please protect me, Agathon," said Socrates. "This
fellow's love's no trifling matter. From the moment I first fell
in love with him I haven't been able to even look at a d
handsome man without him flying into a jealous rage. He
makes a dreadful scene and insults me and can hardly keep his
hands off me. So see that he doesn't do anything now; recon-
cile us, and if he starts to get violent, protect me—I'm terrified
of his insane devotion."

"There's no reconciliation between you and me, Socrates,"
said Alcibiades. "I'll get even with you later. Now give me
some of those ribbons, Agathon. I'm going to wreathe this e
amazing head too, so he can't say I wreathed you but not him,
even though he beats everyone at words all the time, and not
just the day before yesterday like you." With that he took
some of the ribbons and wreathed Socrates, then leaned back
again.

Aristodemus said Alcibiades settled down and said:
"Gentlemen, you look sober to me. That's no way to be—you
should drink! That was our agreement when you let me in. So
as master of ceremonies I choose—myself, till you catch up.
Agathon, have them bring me something big to drink out
of—no, never mind. Boy, bring me that wine cooler over
there!" (He saw that it held almost half a gallon.) He had it 214
filled, drained it, then told the boy to fill it again for Socrates.
As it was being filled, he said: "These tricks don't get me
anywhere with Socrates, gentlemen. No matter how much
you tell him to drink, he drinks it and doesn't even get
drunk."

The cooler was refilled, and Socrates drained it. Then, said
Aristodemus, Eryximachus spoke up: "Alcibiades, is this any
way to carry on, simply drinking like parched travelers with b
no singing or talking over our cups?"

"Eryximachus, best son of the best and soberest father—
joy!"

"Joy," said Eryximachus. "How shall we do it?"

"However you say. We have to listen to you because 'One
doctor is worth a host of others.'[40] So give us your
prescription."

[40] **The quotation** is from *Iliad* 11.514.

"All right, here it is. Before you came, we resolved that we each would give a speech from left to right—as beautiful as
c we could make them—in praise of Love. The rest of us have spoken. Now since you've taken a drink but given no speech, it's only fair for you to give one too. Then set Socrates any topic you choose; he may do the same for the man on his left, and so on."

"Oh, that's beautiful, Eryximachus—to make a drunk man compete with sober ones so he doesn't have a chance. You
d don't believe Socrates, do you? Everything's just the opposite of what he says—if I tried to praise anyone else, man or god, with him around he wouldn't keep his hands off me."

"Why don't you be quiet?" said Socrates.

"No, by Poseidon—not another word about it. I won't praise anyone else as long as you're here."

"Well, go ahead then and praise Socrates if you wish."

e "Do you mean it, Eryximachus? Can I attack him right here and get even with him in front of you all?"

"Hold on!" cried Socrates. "What have you got up your sleeve? Are you planning to praise me to make me look ridiculous, or what?"

"I'm planning to tell the truth," said Alcibiades. "Is that all right with you?"

"Of course," Socrates replied (said Aristodemus). "I'll encourage you to do that."

"All right then," Alcibiades said. "Let's do it like this. If I say anything that isn't true, break right in and call me a liar.
215 Because I won't tell a lie on purpose. But don't be surprised if I get my story mixed up. Someone in my condition can hardly be resourceful enough to list your peculiarities in logical order."

SPEECH OF ALCIBIADES

"Gentlemen, I shall try to praise Socrates in similes. He'll probably think I'm doing it to make him look ridiculous, but my purpose is truth, not ridicule. I claim that Socrates is just
b like those carved Silenuses[41] you see standing in wood carvers' shops holding flutes and shepherd's pipes. They're hollow,

[41] **Bestial spirits** of the woods who spent their lives in lechery and debauchery. They are portrayed on vases as bald, bearded old men with flat faces, pug noses, and enormous erections. They sometimes have horses' ears and often chase nymphs. But they also have great wisdom, and Silenus (singular) was the teacher of the god Dionysus, sort of a mythological Falstaff. Socrates is often likened to Silenus for

and when you open them, you find little statues of the gods inside. I also claim he's like the satyr Marsyas. Even you will hardly deny that you *look* like a satyr, Socrates. But you're like them in other ways too. You're insolent. Isn't that so?—if you try to deny it, I'll produce witnesses. But you don't play the flute, you say? Ah, you do something much more amazing. Marsyas used instruments to bewitch men with the c
magic of his mouth. Even today when his tunes are played—I call the tunes Olympus[42] played Marsyas's because he was his teacher—his tunes, whether played by an expert or some cheap flute girl, are the only ones that can make men possessed and show who's divine enough to be initiated into the sacred mysteries. But you beat Marsyas, Socrates; you do the same thing with the naked voice alone, unaided by instruments. The most eloquent speakers on the most d
interesting topics leave us young fellows cold. But when we hear your discussions—either in person or second-hand—even if the speaker's not worth a damn—all of us, men, women, and children, are stricken and possessed.

"Gentlemen, if I wasn't afraid of sounding drunk, I'd take an oath and confess what I've suffered, and still do suffer, whenever this one speaks. Whenever I hear him, my heart e
jumps higher than a Corybant,[43] tears stream down my cheeks, and I see that hordes of others suffer the same thing. When I used to listen to Pericles or other great speakers, I'd say to myself, 'This is a great speaker.' But I never went through anything like this: My soul didn't riot and accuse me of being a slave. But old Marsyas here has often gotten me into such a state that I felt life wasn't worth living if I kept on as I 216
am. You can't say that's a lie either, Socrates. Why, even now if I cared to lend him my ear I know I'd never hold out—I'd still suffer the same thing. He forces me to admit that even though I'm lacking myself, I still neglect my own self and try to run the government. So I have to hold my ears and run away from him like Odysseus from the Sirens[44]—else I'd sit

both his ugliness and wisdom, and his portraits show a great similarity to pictures of Silenuses. Satyrs were similar to Silenuses. Marsyas was supposed to have invented the flute. He challenged Apollo to a flute-playing contest, lost, and for his insolence was skinned alive.

[42] **A Phrygian musician.**

[43] **Corybants** were wild religious celebrants who, like dervishes, danced themselves into a state of mystical ecstasy and possession.

right down by him and never get away until I'd grown old and gray.

b "And this one's made me suffer what no one would ever think I could: shame. He's the only one who's ever made me feel ashamed. I know I can't contradict him and say I shouldn't do what he says, but when I leave him, I'm seduced by my popularity with the crowd. So I sneak away and avoid him, and when I do see him, I'm ashamed for ignoring the c things we've agreed on. Sometimes I almost wish he were dead, but if that happened, I know I'd be more miserable than ever. I just don't know what to do about him.

"Those are the symptoms that I and many others have suffered from this satyr's piping. Now I'll show how else he's like a satyr and what amazing powers he has. Not one of you d knows him, but I'll expose him now that I've begun. You see Socrates as lusting after beautiful young men and always hanging around with them, starry-eyed and dazzled, ignorant of everything and not knowing a thing. Isn't that a regular satyr act? Damn right it is. But that's just an exterior he wraps around himself like a hollowed-out Silenus. Inside, gentlemen of the symposium, opened up, you can't imagine how full of temperance he is. He doesn't care if someone's handsome—it's inconceivable how he despises beauty—or e rich, or has any of the honors the crowd adores. I swear he thinks that's all worthless and we're nothing, and so he spends his life acting ignorant and playing games with people. But when he's serious and opened up—I'll bet no one's ever seen the statues inside him. But I saw them once, and they seemed to me so golden and divine, so amazing and 217 beautiful that—to put it bluntly—I had to do whatever Socrates said.

"I thought he was serious about my beauty, and I considered that a fantastic stroke of luck because all I'd have to do was favor him to learn everything he knew. You know how fantastically conceited I was about my beauty. So one day I sent my escort[45] home and managed to get alone with this one for the first time—I'd never been alone with him b before. Now, gentlemen, I must tell you the whole truth, so pay attention—and if I tell a lie, Socrates, you denounce me.

[44] **The scene referred to** is found in *Odyssey* 12.165-200.

[45] **Greek boys** normally did not go out unescorted; their escorts are the "slaves" that Pausanias referred to in 183c.

Well, I was *tête-à-tête* with him and thrilled, because I expected him to speak with me like a lover to his loved one. Nothing happened. He spent the day with me, talked with me the way he always did, and then went home.

"After that I invited him to train with me, to see if I could get anywhere that way. And he did train and even wrestle with c
me many times, with no one else around. What can I say? Nothing came of it.

"When that scheme failed, I decided to drop the subtle approach and make a direct attack and find out what was going on. So I invited him to dinner for two, like some lover plotting against his loved one. At first he turned me down, but finally he gave in. The first time he came, he ate and d
wanted to go home. I was ashamed and let him go. But I tried the same scheme again, and this time I kept him talking after dinner until far into the night. Then when he wanted to leave, I said it was too late and insisted that he stay. So he slept in the couch next to mine—the one he'd reclined on at dinner—and there was no one in the room but us.

"So far this has been a nice story that you could tell to e
anyone. But you'd never hear the rest if it wasn't for two things: first, the old saying—'wine and children tell the truth'; second, I think it'd clearly be wrong for someone making a eulogy to obscure such a brilliant and arrogant deed as this. Besides, I'm like a man suffering from snakebite. They say a man in that condition will only talk about it to others who've been bitten, because they're the only ones who'll understand and forgive him if his pain makes him talk and 218
act wild. But I've been bitten by something more painful than a snake in the most sensitive spot—in the heart or soul or whatever you want to call it—by the words of philosophy, which are sharper than a snake's tooth when they sink in the soul of a decent young man, and they make him talk and act wild. Now here I see Phaedruses, Agathons, Eryximachuses, b
Pausaniases, Aristophaneses, Aristodemuses, and Socrates himself; you've all been stung by the madness and frenzy of philosophy, so you can hear the rest. You'll forgive what happened then and what's said now. But you slaves and anyone else who's rude and uninitiated—block your ears with heavy gates.

"Well, gentlemen, when the lights were out and the boys had left I decided not to beat around the bush but tell him c
exactly what I thought. So I nudged him and said:

'Socrates, are you asleep?'

'Not yet,' he said.

'Do you know what?'

'No, what?'

'I think you're the only man worthy of being my lover, but you seem shy about bringing it up. Here's how I feel about it: I think I'd be silly not to favor you in this or in anything else
d you might need, like property of mine or my friends. Nothing is more valuable to me than to become as good a man as I can, and I'm sure I'll never find a better partner to help me than you. And I'd feel much more ashamed around intelligent people if I didn't favor a man like you than I would with the ignorant mob if I did.'

"He didn't exactly lose control. He played dumb and answered in his usual way: 'You *are* a clever rascal,
e Alcibiades, if what you say is true, and I have the power to make you a better man. You must see some tremendous beauty in me totally different from your own good looks. If you're trying to get some of it by trading beauty for beauty, then you're planning to cheat me royally by exchanging counterfeit beauty for genuine, like Diomedes, who traded
219 bronze armor for armor of gold.[46] But sly as you are, you'd better examine me closer to make sure I don't deceive you. The eye of the mind, you know, only begins to see sharply when the eyes in the head start to dim. And you're still a long way from that.'

'Well, now you know how I feel about it, anyhow. But you decide what you think is best for us both.'

'Well said,' he said. 'In the future we'll deliberate and do
b whatever we think best both in this and in everything else.'

"I'd shot my sharpest arrows in this skirmish, and I thought I'd wounded him. So without permitting the defendant another word, I got up, threw my coat over him (it was winter), climbed under his old cloak, flung my arms
c around this utterly divine and amazing man and slept with him the whole night long.[47] You can't say that's a lie either,

[46] **An allusion** to *Iliad* 6.234-36.

[47] **Athenian legal language** used a special pronoun to refer to one's adversary in court, which Alcibiades applies to Socrates. Here the reader expects Alcibiades to use a stock courtroom phrase: "this utterly vile and despicable scoundrel." Instead he says: "this utterly divine and amazing man," a contrary-to-expectation joke (like "once

Socrates. At that point the defendant treated me with such insolence, disdain, and contempt that he spurned my beauty—the thing I valued the most, gentlemen of the jury! (I call you that because you must be the judges of Socrates' arrogance.) By all the gods and goddesses, gentlemen, I swear that when I got up the next morning after having slept with Socrates, nothing more had happened than if I'd slept with d
my father or an older brother.

"Can you imagine my state of mind after that, torn between humiliation at being rejected and admiration for this one's nature, temperance, and courage? He knew more and had more backbone than anyone I'd ever met, so I couldn't get angry and risk losing him, but I couldn't figure out a way to bind him to me either. I knew he'd turn down money as easy e
as Ajax turned cold steel, and he'd dodged the one trap I thought could hold him. So I was baffled and ran around like a slave, enslaved to this one as no one's ever been enslaved before.

"All that happened before the Potidaean campaign,[48] where we were tentmates together. There Socrates showed he could endure hardships not only better than me but better than everyone in the whole army. When we'd be cut off somewhere and had to go hungry—which often happens on campaigns—no one came near him in endurance, and at 220
feasts no one enjoyed himself as much as this one without even drinking wine. But when we made him drink, he'd drink us all under the table. The most amazing thing is that no

seen, never—remembered"). The legal metaphor is made explicit below.

Alcibiades' formal charge against Socrates is *hubris*, which had a wide range of meaning in Greek: presumption, arrogance, violence, etc. It has been translated throughout as "insolence." Its basic idea is that of encroaching upon the rights and privileges of another, whether of a man, a god, or even a natural force (so in 188a-b Eryximachus can say that "insolent Love" causes disorder in the seasons and in the natural world). *Hubris* is not necessarily moral; it is a mere mechanical force, like a law of nature. It throws the world out of balance, but balance will be restored, mechanically, by another law of nature, *dike* ("justice"). In a narrower sense, *hubris* was a legal term for "assault and battery" or for contempt for another's person.

[48] **At the beginning** of the Peloponnesian war, 432-430 B.C. Potidaea is in the Chalcidice. The battle mentioned below (in d), where Alcibiades distinguished himself, occurred during the siege of Potidaea.

one's ever seen him drunk. I bet we'll soon have proof of that tonight.

"As for enduring cold—winters in Potidaea are awful—
b Socrates was amazing. Once it was hideously cold; everything was frozen solid, and everyone either stayed inside, or if he had to go out, he bundled up fantastically and put on shoes and wrapped his feet in felt and sheepskin. But this one walked around in the same old cloak he always wore, and he waded barefoot through the ice easier than the others did with shoes on, and the soldiers began to suspect him of showing contempt for them.

c "So much for that. But 'what a feat this mighty man dared and wrought'[49] on that campaign—and one worth hearing too. He fell into thought one morning trying to figure something out, and when it didn't come, he didn't give up but stood there searching for it. It got to be noon; people began to notice and shake their heads in amazement and say to each other: 'Socrates has been standing since morning, reflecting.'[50] Finally in the evening after supper some of the Ionians brought their beds outside, partly to sleep in the cool
d breeze—it was summer then—and partly to watch Socrates to see if he'd stand there all night. And he did, till dawn. Then he said a prayer to the rising sun and walked away.

"And in battle—you've got to give him his due there too. When we fought the one where the generals awarded me the
e medal for bravery, it was this one who saved me. I'd been wounded, but he didn't abandon me—he rescued both me and my armor. You know I told the generals to give the medal to you, Socrates—you can't criticize me there or say I lied. But they looked at my rank and wanted to give it to me, and you were even more enthusiastic than the generals and insisted that I get it instead of you.

"And you should have seen him the time the army was
221 retreating from Delium.[51] He was in the infantry, but I had a horse. The rest of our troops had been scattered, and this one was retreating with Laches. I happened to be nearby and saw

[49] **The quotation** is from *Odyssey* 4.242.

[50] **A funny-sounding** word in Attic. In the *Clouds* Aristophanes named Socrates' school the "Reflectory."

[51] **A fortification** in Boeotia, captured by the Athenians in 424 B.C. The Thebians attacked and defeated them as they were withdrawing their main army.

them, told them to buck up, and said I wouldn't desert them. This time I could watch Socrates better than at Potidaea—I was on a horse and less scared. The first thing I noticed was how much better Socrates kept his head than Laches did. Then I thought of your line from the *Clouds*, Aristophanes. b
He walked there just like he does here in Athens, 'strutting along like a peacock, rolling his eyes around.'[52] He gave both friend and foe the same level look, and you could see from a distance that here was a man who'd defend himself if someone tried to touch him. That's why they both got away: the enemy almost never bother men like that; they go after the c
ones that run away in panic.

"There are many other amazing things you could say in praise of Socrates, but the most amazing is his absolute uniqueness: He's not like anyone, living or dead. To Achilles you could compare Brasidas[53] and other generals, Pericles to orators like Nestor and Antenor, and everyone to somebody else. But this one's so strange, both himself and his speech, d
that you could search and search and never find anyone like him, ancient or modern, unless of course you compared him to what I've compared him to—not to a man but to satyrs and Silenuses, both him and his discussions.

"Which brings up something I've completely overlooked: Socrates' discussions are also like those Silenuses that open up. The first time you hear them they sound completely e
ridiculous. He wraps them up in words and phrases that remind you of the hide of some insolent old satyr. He talks about mules and saddles and blacksmiths and shoemakers and tanners, and he always seems to say the same things in the same way, so that anyone thoughtless or inexperienced would laugh himself sick. But once you see them open and 222
get inside them, you'll find that they are the only words that make any sense—they're divine and full of statues of excellence, and they concern everything a man ought to consider if he wants to become perfectly good.

"That, gentlemen, is my speech in praise of Socrates, mixed with my complaints about his insolence toward me. And I'm not the only one he's treated like that: He's also b
deceived Charmides, Glaucon's son, Euthydemus, the son of

[52] *Clouds* 362.
[53] **A Spartan general.** Nestor (a Greek) and Antenor (a Trojan) were old and respected advisors in the *Iliad*.

Diocles, and many others, by pretending to be their lover and then turning out to be their loved one instead. So I warn you, Agathon, don't let this one deceive you. Learn from our experiences and beware, so you don't learn like the fool in the proverb—by suffering."

c When Alcibiades had finished, Aristodemus said they all laughed at his frankness because he still seemed to be devoted to Socrates.

Socrates, he said, responded: "You seem sober to me, Alcibiades. Otherwise you'd never have been able to turn your speech back on itself so deftly and hide your real motive for saying everything you did, tucking it in like an afterthought at the very end as though your whole speech did not exist for
d the sole purpose of breaking up Agathon and me, because you think I should love only you and Agathon should be loved by only you. But you didn't fool us—we saw through your little satyr play.[54] Agathon, my dear, let's not let him have his way; let's fix it so no one can ever break us up."

"I think you're right, Socrates," Agathon replied (said
e Aristodemus). "I infer from where he's sitting that he's trying to come between us. But he won't get away with it; I'm coming over to sit by you."

"Right," said Socrates. "Come over here and sit on the other side of me."

"O Zeus!" cried Alcibiades. "Witness what this one makes me suffer. He thinks he has to beat me in everything. But if I can't get my way in this, you old fox, at least let Agathon sit between us."

"Impossible," said Socrates. "You praised me, and now I have to praise the man on my right. If Agathon were to sit on your right, he'd have to praise me before I could praise him.
223 No, let him go, you rascal, and don't be jealous if I praise the young man. The truth is that I want to very much."

"Oh!" said Agathon. "You can't keep me here, Alcibiades. I'm moving. There's nothing I'd like better than have Socrates praise me."

"It's the same old story," said Alcibiades. "With Socrates around no one else has a chance at the handsome young men. See how easily he found an excuse to get Agathon to sit by him."

[54] **A coarse burlesque** presented as the fourth play after a tragic trilogy.

Agathon got up to move. Suddenly a mob of revelers came b
to the door, found it left open by someone in leaving, and
came in and sat down with the rest. The place was filled with
uproar and confusion and everyone was forced to guzzle wine
without order or restraint.

Aristodemus said that Eryximachus and Phaedrus and
some others got up and left, and he fell asleep and slept a long c
time because the nights were long at that time of year. He
woke up toward morning when the roosters were already
crowing, and he saw that the others were either asleep or had
left and that only Agathon, Aristophanes, and Socrates were
awake and drinking wine from a large cup that they passed
from left to right. Socrates was having a discussion with
them. Aristodemus said he couldn't remember much of it—he d
had missed the beginning and kept dozing off through the
rest—but the main point Socrates was trying to force them to
accept was that the writing of both tragedy and comedy is the
job of the same man, and a skilled tragedian also knows how
to write comedies. They were being forced to agree, though
they weren't following very well and kept nodding off, and
first Aristophanes fell asleep and then, when it was fully
light, Agathon fell asleep too.

Socrates, having put the two poets to sleep, got up and left,
and Aristodemus said he followed him, as was his habit. He
said Socrates went to the Lyceum and took a bath, spent the
day as he spent every other, and towards evening, he said,
went home to bed.