TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF EROS

Transfiguring Passion at the Limits of Discipline

EDITED BY VIRGINIA BURRUS AND CATHERINE KELLER

FORDHAM UNIVERSITY PRESS • NEW YORK • 2006
What Do We Talk About When We Talk About Platonic Love?

Daniel Boyarin

In his celebrated study of Christian love, Anders Nygren identifies the emergence of heresy with the perversion of agape: "Agape loses its original meaning and is transformed into Eros; not, however, be it observed, into the sublimated 'heavenly Eros' of which Plato and his followers speak, but into that despised variety, 'vulgar Eros.'"¹ The implications of this framing require unpacking. To do so, we must return to Plato's Symposium, where the term "heavenly Eros" occurs in the discourse of Pausanias, signifying a practice of desire that begins with physical love but ultimately transcends the physical. Yet Pausanias is not the only, or even the most privileged, speaker in the Symposium. The famous speech of Diotima, cited by Socrates, arguably lays greater claim to representing Plato's definitive views on love. Thus, in referring to "heavenly Eros" as that "of which Plato and his followers speak," Nygren erases any difference between the Pausanian ideology of eros and that of Diotima/Socrates—the latter of which I take to be Platonic love."² Indeed, Nygren makes this conflation quite explicit: "In the Symposium Plato feels no necessity to make Socrates or Diotima speak about it, but entrusts to Pausanias the task of explaining the difference between what he calls 'vulgar (pandemos) Eros' and 'heavenly (ouranios) Eros.'"³ For Nygren there is, then, no difference at all between Pausanian heavenly love and Platonic love. For me this distinction makes all the difference. In Pausanian heavenly love, there is room (to be sure at the bottom) for sex, a point glossed over by Nygren, while Platonic love deems all physical sex vulgar. ⁴ As we shall
see, what is at stake is not only a sexual but also an epistemological and, finally, a political difference: Pausanias speaks not only for sex but also for the city—that is, for democratic Athens—while Plato, via Diotima/Socrates, advocates a philosophical flight not only from carnal sex but also from the indeterminacies of truth and power inherent to the politics of democracy.

Nygren is, of course, not the only one to have collapsed this distinction. For Michel Foucault, for example, there is also little difference between Pausanias’s heavenly love and Platonic love, though his reasoning is almost the opposite: “One should keep in mind that [Platonic] ‘asceticism’ was not a means of disqualifying the love of boys; on the contrary, it was a means of stylizing it and hence, by giving it shape and form, of valorizing it.” Where Nygren obscured the difference between Pausanias and Plato by denying the physicality of Pausanias’s ideal, Foucault obscures that difference by downplaying the radicality of Plato’s asceticizing of eros.

Kenneth Dover, in contrast, does make clear distinctions between Plato’s Pausanias (as the representative of the “best” of Athenian eros) and his Diotima (as the conveyer of Plato’s own views), arguing that in Plato’s writings “heterosexual eros is treated on the same basis as homosexual copulation, a pursuit of bodily pleasure which leads no further . . . and in Symposium, it is sub-rational, an expression of the eros that works in animals.” Dover thus discriminates plainly between the sexual practices of Athenians in general—even in their most high-minded, heavenly form—and Plato’s disdain for all physical sex. Below I will affirm and develop Dover’s views on this issue, departing from the legacies represented by both Nygren and Foucault. Plato, I will suggest, promotes an erotics that is almost in binary opposition to the erotics of Athens as best represented in Pausanias’s speech, and this is consistent with, indeed part and parcel of, Plato’s whole stance vis-à-vis the life of the polis itself.

In Platonic love, queerness itself is queered. Heavenly (Pausaniasian) pederastic homoeroticism may (not unlike gay marriage) inscribe a realm of male relationality that is deemed superior to but still comparable with marital heteroeroticism. In contrast, Platonic eros sets itself against both pederasty and marriage in resistance to the conventions of the ancient city (and perhaps to sociopolitical “convention” per se) while at the same time disrupting the female figures (Ery- one. Here, I suppose Plato frames as Christians represent both, a celibate eros (gay and struc- Peter Brown has the ancient work, then, one of the ancient writings fas understood, in particu- particular, of the reading of the Platonic and Pa- a more recent (and theory of eros of the ancient Athenian polis that some aspect to Plato than in cer- certain very trans- wholly celibate people before Christia

PLATO AS AN

In recent years, a number of historians of the studies. How- equally important to the continuity cultural forms. M. Halperin In a compelling because she r
time disrupting the boy-versus-woman binary via the insertion of fictive female figures (Diotima, Philosophy) into the male-male erotic economy. Here, I suggest, we may find a genealogy for Christian sex: what Plato frames as the resistance of philosophy to rhetoric, late ancient Christians represent as the resistance of the ascetic to the everyday; for both, a celibate sex life is positioned in opposition to the domesticized eros (gay and straight) of the city.

Peter Brown has written, "Like long-familiar music, the idées recues of the ancient world filled the minds of educated Christians when they, in their turn, came to write on marriage and on sexual desire." Surely, then, one of the most important tasks in constructing a genealogy of late ancient writings on sex and sexuality would be to achieve the most nuanced understanding possible of those idées recues themselves, and, in particular, of their conflictual dynamics. Here I would like to present a reading of the Symposium that points up the radical difference between Platonic and Pausanian love, disrupting not only Nygren's view but also a more recent (Foucauldian) scholarly consensus inclined to place Plato's theory of eros on a continuum with (rather than in opposition to) classical Athenian pederastic practice. Such a reading leads to a suggestion that some aspects of early Christian thought about eros were even closer to Plato than is generally recognized now. In arguing thus, I reinstate a certain very traditional reading of Platonic love as a forerunner of the wholly celibate erotics of ancient Christianity—as a Christian eroticism before Christianity, so to speak.10

PLATO AS AN EARLY PLATONIST

In recent years it is certainly the speech of Aristophanes concerning the spherical people of three sexes that has excited the most interest in scholarship of the Symposium centered on the history of sexuality or queer studies. However, Socrates's recounting of Diotima's speech is at least equally important, especially if we are seeking better understanding of the continuities between ancient Greek and late ancient Judeo-Christian cultural formations. One of the most important of questions, as David M. Halperin has realized, has to do with the question of Diotima's sex. In a compelling discussion, Halperin has argued that Diotima is a woman because she represents or substitutes for a "real" woman, Aspasia (the
much cherished lover of Pericles), about whom there was a strong, persistent pre-Platonic tradition that she had been Socrates's instructor in matters erotic. While I endorse Halperin's account of Diotima as a "cover" for Aspasia and his perhaps startling conclusion that she is a prophetess because she is a woman (and not the other way around), I think that this conclusion could helpfully be restated more trenchantly. Halperin puts it this way: "[Aspasia] would be quite out of place in the Symposium, where Plato clearly wants to put some distance between his own outlook on eros and the customary approach to that topic characteristic of the Athenian demimonde." Although I agree with the first clause, I quite sharply disagree with the last: It is not the Athenian demimonde from which Plato wishes to distance himself (or not only that) but the Athenian polis and its everyday life of marrying, having sex (with boys and wives), procreating, and being involved in politics. It is trivial for Plato to distinguish himself from the eros of the demimonde or even from what Pausanias dubs "vulgar" eros, but Plato is going for more here. He is putting some distance, on my reading, between his own eros and all eros that includes physical sex, and especially Athenian heavenly eros. It is not so much Aspasia as hetaira or courtesan that would be so problematic for Plato as Aspasia as the "wife" and the mother of Pericles's child, Pericles Junior (ultimately granted Athenian citizenship). To be sure, "Plato had a primary reason for preferring a woman, any woman, to be the mouthpiece of his erotic theory." So far, so good. However Halperin goes on to say, "But in order to replace Aspasia with another woman who was not a hetaira, Plato had to find an alternate source of erotic authority, another means of sustaining his candidate's claim to be able to pronounce on the subject of erotics. . . . In the Symposium, however, he looks to religious sources of authority, to which some Greek women were believed by the Greeks to have access." Although going on to more complex explanations of Diotima, Halperin does not reject so much as supplement the Diotima as Aspasia in priestess-drag account, allowing, rather, that the Diotima replaces Aspasia substitution may be true enough, but maintaining at the same time that it does not at all explain why Plato remains invested in that tradition. For my part, I want to dwell on this account a bit longer.

On my reading, the counter-political prophetess from Puteine and thus a potential rival of the corporal prophetess of the Athenian polis is not merely "outsider" (as an old woman to my reading of Socrates's account for Aspasia) to understand Diotima. He is a teacher of rhetoric, a parody of Pericles, a close approximation to the style, a point of the theory of the polis, that language, that speech-making, is a form of rhetoric. Thucydides, when Soc sis, when Soc is, his teacher in er is of rhetoric, absolute binary rhetoric, the latter positively rhetoric, and the former. And we remember, was Aspasia w meant to miss general oration (rhetoric). But the sexual, political, alien Peloponnesia.

Both Aspasia and her...
On my reading, the relationship to Aspasia is crucial for understanding the counter-political eros of the Symposium. Not only is Diotima a prophetess from Prophetville (in Halperin’s delightful translation of Mantinea) and thus a source of authority but also, as such, she is totally out of the corporal politico-erotic economy of the city. Her Peloponnesian origin is not beside the point. This notion of Diotima as doubly marked “outsider” (as an apparently celibate woman and as a non-Athenian) is key to my reading of the Symposium. If, following Halperin’s attractive suggestion, Diotima is a replacement for Aspasia, more of an attempt to account for Aspasia’s place in Platonic discourse seems necessary in order to understand Diotima. One important clue to this location is Plato’s dialogue, the Menexenus, in which Aspasia is presented also as a sort of teacher of rhetoric and the producer of a funeral oration that is a parody of Pericles’s as given by Thucydides.

Thucydides’s original and Plato’s lampoon are both marked by their close approximations (one serious and one parodic) of Gorgias’s high style, a point of some importance since, for Plato, the theory of erotics and the theory of rhetorics are closely aligned. Socrates, throughout the corpus, has only two female teachers, Aspasia and Diotima. In the Menexenus, in a context in which Socrates is openly mocking rhetoric and speechmaking, he cites Aspasia as his teacher in rhetorics. In the Symposium, when Socrates wishes to laud dialogue over rhetoric, it is Diotima, his teacher in erotics, who represents dialogue, for Plato the very antithesis of rhetoric. Rhetoric and dialogue are, for Plato, positioned in an absolute binary opposition, with the former marked negatively and the latter positively. “Bad erotics” are associated with “bad” speech practice, rhetoric, and “good” erotics with “good” speech forms, dialectic. When we remember, once again, that according to more ancient tradition it was Aspasia who was Socrates’s instructor in erotics, I think we are not meant to miss this binary opposition, the seductive, flattering, lying funeral oration (Menexenus 234c–235a) taught and given by the beautiful, sexual, political Athenian Aspasia versus the true dialogue of the holy alien Peloponnesian prophetess, Diotima.

Both Aspasia and Diotima are presented as having taught Socrates some tekhē in the form of a discourse. Both discourses are indicated, within the dialogues themselves, as not truly simply the products of these
women—Aspasia speaks for Pericles, and Socrates will deliver Diotima’s speech—so we are surely meant to look for significance here. Aspasia, Socrates’s traditional instructor in erotics, becomes his instructor in rhetoric, while a new woman is produced to teach him proper erotics. As Allen, with his characteristic perspicacity puts it: “We know where we are [in the Menexenus]. Socrates in the Gorgias distinguishes two kinds of rhetoric. There is philosophical rhetoric, aimed at truth and the good of the soul, whether it gives pleasure or pain to the hearer, and organized like the work of an artist to attain its aim. Then there is base rhetoric, aimed at gratification and pleasure, organized randomly according to knack and experience, a species of flattery; its effect on the hearer is like witchcraft or enchantment.”20 The analogy (or better, homology) in the realm of erotics is only too clear. Aspasia can teach only the false use of language, just as she would have been able to teach only the lower erotics that pursue pleasure, procreation, and political power, while Diotima can teach true erotics, because her sexuality is entirely out of all of these realms, and thus, to complete the ratio, she teaches true speaking (dialectic), as well.

This reading is strongly consonant with but expands the scope of Halperin’s second major point as to the femaleness of Diotima, namely that since Plato has supplanted the Athenian “male” model of eros as acquisition of the beautiful with a “female” one of procreation of the beautiful, it is appropriate that the “mouthpiece” be a woman. Halperin writes: “What Plato did was to take an embedded habit of speech (and thought) that seems to have become detached from a specific referent in the female body and, first to reembed it as ‘feminine’ by associating it with the female person of Diotima through her extended use of gender-specific language, then to disembed it once again, to turn ‘pregnancy’ into a mere image of (male) spiritual labor, just as Socrates’s male voice at once embodies and disembodies Diotima’s female presence.”21 The precise choice of woman, or better put, the remarkably absent woman, the absent real woman, Aspasia, the woman who wasn’t there, as it were, is an essential aspect of the overall rhetoric of the piece. Since Plato is adopting a procreative model of erotic desire, but contemptuous of the physical procreation of corporeal children, the teacher cannot be a gyne (woman, wife) but must be a parthenos (virgin). Diotima may be a female, but in
Greek, I think, she is not quite a woman. She is, however, on this reading a real, if fictional, female.

The substitution of the Mantinean mantic for the Athenian partner, lover, politician, mother (not demimondaine), was a very marked one indeed. If Aspasia is the female version of Pericles, Diotima makes the perfect female version of Socrates, the anti-Pericles. Diotima has to be a woman, on this account, in order to negate Aspasia and all that she means.

THE PHILOSOPHER AGAINST THE POLIS

A somewhat more detailed reading of the Symposium will, I hope, further sharpen these points and also raise others. As a motto for a jumping off point for the following discussion, an oft-cited text of Socrates’s speaking is apt:

That leaves only a very small fraction, Ademantus, of those who spend their time on philosophy as of right. Some character of noble birth and good upbringing, perhaps, whose career has been interrupted by exile, and who for want of corrupting influences has followed his nature and remained with philosophy. Or a great mind born in a small city, who thinks the political affairs of his city beneath him, and has no time for them. . . . Our friend Theages has a bridle which is quite good at keeping people in check. Theages has all the qualifications for dropping out of philosophy, but physical ill-health keeps him in check, and stops him going into politics. . . . Those who have become members of this small group have tasted how sweet and blessed a possession is philosophy. They can also, by contrast, see quite clearly the madness of the many. They can see that virtually nothing anyone in politics does is in any way healthy. (Republic 496a-c)\(^{22}\)

The opposition between the life of a philosopher and the life of the polis could not possibly be clearer than it is in this passage. The philosopher is an alien by birth or even by virtue of his ill-formed body that keeps him out of the erotic and political commerce described, for example, by symposiast Pausanias, or is one who is blessed with a certain
mantic ability as Socrates is. Diotima has all three of these characteristics: She is certainly a very marked sort of alien, "a great mind born in a small city," and is a Mantinean mantic to boot. Andrea Nightingale has already connected this passage in the Republic with the Symposium at exactly the point at which it is of interest to my argument here. She writes: "What is the nature of this new brand of alien [the philosopher]?...One of the most prominent aspects of Plato's definition of the philosopher is the opposition he forges between the philosophic 'outsider' and the various types of people who made it their business to traffic in wisdom." Nightingale then goes on to remark that "the clearest and most explicit enunciation of this phenomenon in the Platonic corpus" is perhaps "the Symposium's handling of the exchange of 'virtue' for sexual favors."21

Instead of Pausanias's description of a good eros from which virtue flows in exchange for semen (or better put, perhaps, in which semen is the material within which virtue flows), Diotima inscribes an eros that is entirely spiritual in nature, outside the circulation (the traffic) of the sociality of the polis. She is explicitly speaking against, above all, Pausanias, that ultimate representative of the highest-mindedness of Athenian eros, the one who sharply distinguishes between vulgar love (pederasty) and Uranian love (pederasty cum pedagogy).22 Socrates, it will be remembered, explicitly rejects Agathon's request that he recline next to him, "so that I can lay hold of you and thereby enjoy the benefit of that piece of wisdom which occurred to you," to which Socrates replies that "it is not in the nature of wisdom to flow from one person to another like liquid flowing from a fuller vessel to an emptier one" (175c-e), thereby capsizing the entire self-understanding of the Athenian pederastic/pedagogical system.23 I would like to suggest that the Symposium is utterly of a piece with Plato's entire oeuvre in its articulation of a doubled social-space (the polis versus the Academy—a full two miles away from the agora) coarticulated with a doubled ontological space (the physical versus the immaterial) and a doubled epistemological space (what appears and what is true, doxa and episteme). There is a doubled female figure that corresponds to this doubling, as well: Aspasia who belongs to the agora vs. Diotima who belongs to the Academy, if not further than that.24 Finally, there is a doubled space of logos as well: rhetoric corresponding to the first of each of these binary pairs and dialectic corresponding to the second.25 This crucial consequence of permitting or forbidding speeches in praise of truth, stands for...
the second.\textsuperscript{26} This consistent and persistent doubling has much more crucial consequences for the history of sexuality than any details of permitting or forbidding of this or that sexual practice.\textsuperscript{29} Encomia, beautiful speeches in praise of eros, stand for Pausanian, demotic sex in Plato’s economy, while austere dialectic, with its fearless search for so-called truth, stands for the true eros of love of the Forms.

SEXUAL INTERCOURSE

The Symposium stages these oppositions on various literary levels, with respect to both the form of the discourse and its content. The Symposium is not at all a dialogue, but, in fact, a staged series of encomia, of epideictic rhetorical pieces. In fact it is signaled as such right at the beginning in Phaedrus’s first utterance: “How could people pay attention to such trifles and never, not even once, write a proper hymn to Love” (177c).\textsuperscript{30} To which plaint Eryximachus immediately responds that this is exactly what they will spend the evening doing.

This contrast between epideictic encomia and dialogue comes first between the speeches of Aristophanes and Agathon, where Socrates is represented as attempting to lead the conversation into a “discussion” or dialogue and Phaedrus interrupts: “Agathon, my friend, if you answer Socrates, he’ll no longer care whether we get anywhere with what we’re doing here, so long as he has a partner for discussion [dialogesthai]. Especially if he’s handsome. Now, like you, I enjoy listening to Socrates in discussion, but it is my duty to see to the praising of Love and to exact a speech from every one of this group. When each of you has made his offering to the god, then you can have your discussion” (194d).\textsuperscript{31}

In fact, the symposium (if not the Symposium) is conceived as a rhetorical competition, echoing the theatrical competition for which the party and Agathon’s victory therein is a celebration. Moreover, the text is already inscribing proper pederasty, à la Socrates, as the dialogue of the older philosopher and a beautiful boy.

Halperin has already well articulated how radically Plato’s view of eros departs from the Athenian norm, represented at its best in Pausanias’s speech: “Because ἔρως, on the Platonic view . . . aims at procreation, not at possession, and so cannot be sexually realized, Platonic anterōs [the aroused desire of the ἐρωμένος, the “beloved”] does not lead either to a
reversal of sexual roles or to the promotion of sexual passivity on the part of the beloved.” For Halperin, the great departure of Plato is from the hierarchical model of sex to one of mutual desire and pleasuring. Halperin goes on to indicate that this reciprocity of active desire, “Plato’s remodeling of the homoerotic ethos of classical Athens,” “has direct consequences for his program of philosophical inquiry.” It results in an ethos of true conversation in which “mutual desire makes possible the ungrudging exchange of questions and answers which constitutes the soul of philosophic practice.” Halperin concludes, “Since any beautiful soul can serve as a mirror for any other, reciprocal desire need not be confined to the context of physical relations between the sexes (which Plato, at least according to one reading of Phaedrus 250e, appears to have despised). The kind of mutuality in eros traditionally imputed to women in Greek culture could therefore find a new home in the erotic dynamics of Platonic love.” I need to unpack Halperin’s argument a bit here, for it is a complex one. On the one hand, he claims that Platonic eros is fundamentally reversed in its values from Pausanian (demotic Athenian) values, that there is a Platonic transvaluation of values. Where Pausanian, Greek love founded its theory of even the highest eros on desire to possess, for Plato desire to procreate is the aim of eros. Since procreation (according to Halperin’s Plato) is impossible to realize sexually, it follows, therefore, that there is none of the dominance and subordination, the binary of the penetrator and the penetrated, in Platonic eros, as there is in even the most elevated forms of Athenian pederasty. Moreover, on the physical level of eros (which Plato “despises” in both its hetero and homo avatars), the ambiguity of the pederastic object (he will grow up to be “one of us”) virtually precludes him being represented in everyday Athenian thought as a mutually desiring subject, precisely because his desire would be the “unmanly” one to be possessed and penetrated. Consequently, for this piece of his metaphor for philosophy Plato had to turn to the acceptably mutual desire of the heterosexual couple (since women will never grow up to be men, they are not dishonored—any more than they are already—by their love of being penetrated or love and desire for the one who penetrates them). While I accept that the procreative motive as Plato’s new model for eros is a crucially important motive and that this surely contributed to the femalehood of Diotima—
Who better than a woman to understand a desire for procreation? Who indeed?—I cannot swallow Halperin’s idealizing reading of the eros/anteros of the philosophical dialogue, any more than its idealizing reading of heterosex (or homo sex) as mutual and egalitarian.

Since, of course, procreation can be realized sexually, if one partner is male and one female, as Diotima herself makes quite beautifully clear (206c–e), there is more, then, going on in the move from the physically procreative eros of the heterosexual couple (Pericles and Aspasia) to the purely spiritual and intellectual one (Socrates and Diotima) than Halperin has articulated, namely a strong displacement of procreation itself. Where Halperin’s argument seems to assume that the thrust of Plato’s innovation is to find a way to assimilate male–male love to that of male and female, and therefore Diotima must be a woman, I would read it almost in opposite fashion as a way of making male–female love “as good as” male–male love, by removing the sexual element from the former as well as from the latter. Hence, in my view, the “vulgar” understanding of Platonic love as love without sex, whatever the sexes, has much to commend it. The relationship between Socrates and Diotima, models, as it were, the possibility of a purely spiritual eros between a man and a woman while theorizing that nonsexual eros as procreative in both its same-sex and other-sex (but always no-sex) versions. The mutuality of the heterosexual couple is a chimera, since the only reason, so it seems, that the female is permitted to desire the male penetrator is that she is always/already of dominated, penetrable status. This would suggest that using this eros/anteros as the model for “mutual desire [that] makes possible the ungrudging exchange of questions and answers which constitutes the soul of philosophic practice” could raise as many questions as it answers, and indeed, in my view, it does, as a further investigation of the Symposium will disclose. In short, I shall suggest that the eros of philosophical dialogue is, for Plato, as much penetrative and hierarchical as Pausanian pederasty or Pericles’s liaison with Aspasia. The move that Plato makes is a decisive one away from the body, both the body of pleasure and the body of procreation, to a disembodied version of both. The question of an eros of speaking is, therefore, at the very heart of the Symposium, as much or even more (for being partly disguised) as in any
of the dialogues, including the ones that most explicitly foreground it, such as the Gorgias.

The first speech by Phaedrus, at any rate, can be profitably read as a sort of parody of epideictic rhetoric. Indeed, in one reading, at least, all of the speeches are such parodies. Explicit thematizing of rhetoric, however, appears when Agathon begins his own speech by insisting that before speaking he will have to theorize about speech—about what is proper and improper form in such a speech. Plato is explicitly setting Agathon up as a rhetor, that is, as a sophist and not philosopher, one who allegedly is concerned with form and not with content or truth. This theme is doubled in Socrates’s second interchange with Agathon:

When Agathon finished, Aristodemus said, everyone there burst into applause, so becoming to himself and to the god did they think the young man’s speech.

Then Socrates glanced at Eryximachus and said, “Now do you think I was foolish to feel the fear that I felt before? Didn’t I speak like a prophet a while ago when I said that Agathon would give an amazing speech and I would be tongue-tied?”

“You were prophetic about one thing, I think,” said Eryximachus, “that Agathon would speak well. But you, tongue-tied? No, I don’t believe that.”

“Bless you,” said Socrates. “How am I not going to be tongue-tied, I or anyone else, after a speech delivered with such beauty and variety? The other parts may not have been so wonderful, but that at the end!”

Socrates is speaking here with his usual high irony, because it is precisely the last part of Agathon’s speech that was composed and delivered in high Gorgianic style, and even in an over-the-top parodic version thereof. However, lest we miss this point, Plato has Socrates go on and underline it: “Who would not be struck dumb on hearing the beauty of the words and phrases? Anyway, I was worried that I’d not be able to say anything that came close to them in beauty, and so I would almost have run away and escaped, if there had been a place to go. And, you see, the speech reminded me of Gorgias, so that I actually experienced what
Homer describes: I was afraid that Agathon would end by sending the Gorgian head / Gorgonic head, awesome at speaking in a speech, against my speech, and this would turn me to stone by striking me dumb.”

Socrates insists that it is the gorgiasness of the rhetoric that stuns into silence, while others in other dialogues (Meno), to be sure, would accuse Socrates of using dialectic to stun them. At this point, after some further gibes at Gorgias’s alleged willingness to say anything on any topic without any regard for truth, Socrates insists that he will speak only if certain conditions be met: “But I didn’t even know the method for giving praise; and it was in ignorance that I agreed to take part in this. . . . Goodbye to that! I’m not giving another eulogy [encomium] using that method, not at all!—I wouldn’t be able to do it!—but, if you wish, I’d like to tell the truth my way” (198a–199c).37

Socrates declares that “you will hear the truth about Love, and the words and phrasing will take care of themselves.” This is (or at any rate becomes) a standard diatribe against rhetoric, claiming that it cares more for the form than for the substance, if it cares for the substance at all. It seems at first, notwithstanding this jibe, that he is offering just another version or type of an encomium, perhaps one that will be less beautiful but all the more truthful for that, but then, quite unexpectedly, when given permission, what Socrates turns to is not encomium at all, but rather a dialectical interrogation of an Agathon turned virtual Protagoras.

For Leo Strauss what this means (somewhat ridiculously) is that “when people are too tired to make long speeches, they are not too tired to make conversation, engage in dialogue.”38 Jowett provides a much more cogent and revealing reading when he refers to “the ruling passion of Socrates for dialectics.” Socrates, “who will argue with Agathon instead of making a speech, and will only speak at all upon the condition that he is allowed to speak the truth.”39 In other words, we might say, dialogue equals philosophy, that is, the search for truth,40 while encomia, rhetorical speeches, are incorrigibly marred owing to their search for their own beauty, or, even worse, for mere crowd-pleasing effect.

I wish again to emphasize the parallel between Aspasia’s rhetoric, sophism, traffic in wisdom and Pausanian pederasty on the one hand and between philosophy, alienated wisdom, and Diotima’s desire on the other. Agathon (the beautiful), that stand-in for Gorgias and through him
for Protagoras (and indeed Isocrates), has been made out to be a false-speaker, because he delivers encomia and does not participate in dialectic, as opposed to Socrates who will use speech only to discover “truth.” And indeed at the end, when Agathon has—predictably, indeed perforce—capitulated, Socrates intones with great solemnity and self-regard, that it is not he who is impossible to refute, but the truth (201c)."

Socrates proceeds with his typical (and as usual fallacious) demolition of the argument of his sophistic antagonist by means of dialectical brow-beating. The fallacy in this elenchus has been well articulated by Steven Lowenstam: “Agathon had argued that Eros embodied happiness, beauty, youth, tenderness, poetry, and the four virtues. In his dialogue with Socrates, however, he is forced to agree to three major premises: (1) desire always has an object; (2) one lacks what one desires; and (3) desire can be anticipatory. Socrates introduces the third point to preclude Agathon from arguing that a healthy man may wish for health. Hence, when Socrates asserts that the healthy man desires health not for the present but for the future, he is merely demonstrating that this case confirms the second point: The healthy man desires what he currently lacks, health in the future. After Agathon agrees to these points, he capitulates to Socrates’s conclusion that Eros can be neither good nor beautiful.” Allan Bloom describes Socrates’s victory here as “single combat, and at this Socrates is the unsurpassed master.” Then he remarks, “Anybody who puts himself in the position of wrestling with Socrates always loses and goes away either angry, claiming that Socrates has cheated, or entranced by his unrivaled skill and strength.”

The fact that all of the speakers in the text up until Agathon refer to doxa marks them off as of the rhetorical/sophistic party. It is this demolition by Socrates of Agathon’s rhetoric, of his speechifying, that will set up the explicitly protreptic discourse by Diotima/Socrates/Plato in favor of the dialogical/philosophical bia$. C. J. Rowe has described this sequence perfectly: “[Socrates] launches into the positive part of [Diotima’s] account; but it is still in the form of responses to S, so that in effect, although the final part is a long piece of monologue in reply to the briefest of questions (208b7–9), there is strictly speaking nothing by way of a continuous speech to match the others, … In short, he ‘speaks his piece’ in a rather special way, which has more in common with his preferred method, with the set speech is certainly, in re- conclusion.” Indepopine that the m whole Platonic c with its absolute c claims of rhetoric Socrates’s treat an acting out of p whom Socrates v sumably incorrect Agathon and his and hierarchy apto Socrates’s reaf if Agathon the estrate his mind (phallus), then, p that the ordinat need of his erst This reading eros than Hahps in the relations we can find her of male-male desier of a Byzant differences in this also raises prob area, as it does Platonic “dialectogical ideal to crated, taking, by Pausant’s were.” It is the explains why I vagina for plea
preferred methods of conversation (dialogeis, see esp. 194d5–6n.) than with the set speeches of the other contributors, even if it reaches what is certainly, in retrospect (and must in any case be) a predetermined conclusion.' Indeed, by only a slightly perverse argument, one could opine that the major theme of the Symposium, as indeed of virtually the whole Platonic corpus, is its protreptic discourse on dialectic/dialogue with its absolute and coercive "Truth," over against the shady and shaky claims of rhetoric or debate, with its very precarious grasp on the same.  

Socrates's treatment of Agathon (meaning good, beautiful) is meant as an acting out of proper pederasty—Agathon being the beautiful boy with whom Socrates would love to have conversation, as opposed to the presumably incorrect (however "heavenly") pederastic relationship between Agathon and his actual lover, Pausanias. The same relations of power and hierarchy apply as in Athenian man-boy love: Agathon must assent to Socrates's reasoning, but the realm is not of the body but of the soul. If Agathon the eromenos gratifies the need of Socrates the erastès to penetrate his mind with logos (as he does with his body and Pausanias's phallus), then, presumably Agathon will receive some of the same things that the ordinary eromenos is supposed to receive from his gratifying the need of his erastès to penetrate his body with phallus.

This reading puts, I think, quite a different spin on this philosophical eros than Halperin's with its idealizing description of perfect mutuality in the relations of philosophical erastès and eromenos. On the one hand, we can find here in philosophical dialogue, Platonic style, a strong model of male-male desire, as spiritualized and as intense as the male-male desire of a Byzantine monastery. That nevertheless should not blind us to differences in the ways in which that model is constructed. My reading also raises problems for one of Halperin's explanations for Diotima's genitalia, as it does for Foucault's similar insistence on the mutuality of the Platonic "dialectic of love." However, it clearly assimilates Plato's pedagogical ideal to pederasty in the sharp asymmetry of the penetrator, penetrated, taking the pederastic model of Athens at its best, as represented by Pausanias's speech, and turning it on its head from its bottom, as it were. It is that transfer from anus, vagina, and womb to pure mind that explains why Diotima is not Aspasia. She is the possessor of neither a vagina for pleasure nor a womb for physical procreation but both, in her,
are purely spiritual entities, metaphors that help us grasp the proper eros. Ideal eros, for Plato, is entirely a mind-fuck.32

Socrates completes his ventriloquistoric peroration by insisting: "Such, Phaedrus, is the tale which I heard from the stranger of Mantinea, and which you may call the encomium of love, or what you please." By enacting in the discourse the substitution of dialectic (philosophy) for encomia (rhetoric), Diotima has matched in the form of her expression the form of its content as well, the replacement of the physical eros and the rhetorical, political, ethical socialization that is attendant on it—Pausanias’s "heavenly love"—with a heavenly love that does not belong to the world of getting and spending at all.

For Foucault, the move to philosophical love (Socratic/Platonic style) is the product of a structural problem with pederasty. As he puts it,

The preoccupation of the Greeks, on the other hand, did not concern the desire that might incline an individual to this kind of relationship, nor did it concern the subject of this desire; their anxiety was focused on the object of pleasure, or more precisely, on that object insofar as he would have to become in turn the master in the pleasure that was enjoyed with others and in the power that was exercised over oneself. It was here, at this problematization (how to make the object of pleasure into a subject who was in control of his pleasures), that philosophical erotics, or in any case Socratic-Platonic reflection on love, was to take its point of departure.33

Foucault allows that "one does find in Plato the theme that love should be directed to the soul of boys rather than to their bodies. But he was not the first or the only one to say this." Even so, "(and both the Symposium and the Phaedrus are quite explicit on this point; [Plato] does not trace a clear, definitive, and uncrossable dividing line between the bad love of the body and the glorious love of the soul."

Diotima’s Platonic love, however, is entirely different from that of Pausanias, first in that it begins, as we have just seen, in a love of bodies that does not involve touching, contact, or mixing at all but only the begetting of beautiful ideas. We thus find two types of soul-love, even setting aside the vulgar love of men for women or men for men which

is primarily physically, Pausanias, Athenian is philosophy (205e) affectionate bodies that is a lover, the philosopher "just what it is to

When someone and begins to is what it is to.

Love: one goes out from beautiful body to two artful bodies to beau tiful things, a lesson, which comes to know

Now it is clear boys does not it Plato who sees than having sex even higher ring. We see, according love and ending begin with de clamation of Beau running institute philosophy because love can et an education in

We find this (251e), where the boy as one co through the eye
is primarily physically oriented and goes nowhere even according to Pausanias. Pausanian heavenly love is philotimia (208c), while Platonic love is philosophia (205d). Platonic love does not, therefore, begin where Athenian (and Spartan) love ends but somewhere else, in a love of beautiful bodies that is never realized sexually at all, and it is only this kind of lover, the philosopher, who could ever hope to achieve knowledge of “just what it is to be beautiful” (211d):

When someone rises by these stages, through loving boys correctly, and begins to see this beauty, he has almost grasped his goal. This is what it is to go aright, or be led by another, into the mystery of Love: one goes always upwards for the sake of this Beauty, starting out from beautiful things are using them like rising stairs; from one body to two and from two to all beautiful bodies, then from beautiful bodies to beautiful customs, and from customs to learning beautiful things, and from these lessons he arrives in the end at this lesson, which is learning of this very Beauty, so that in the end he comes to know just what it is to be beautiful. (21c-d)

Now it is clear enough from this passage that this correct loving of boys does not involve physical sex, else we would have to imagine a Plato who sees having sex with two beautiful bodies a higher practice than having sex with one and having sex with all beautiful bodies an even higher rung than that. It’s a nice fantasy, but not, I think, Plato’s. We see, accordingly, not one ladder but two, one beginning with physical love and ending with good government (the Lesser Mysteries) and one beginning with an eros only of eyes and ideas and ending with contemplation of Beauty itself (the Greater Mysteries). Pausanian love, rhetoric, running institutions, these are all the province of banastic man; only philosophy belongs to daimonic man. The most that Pausanian heavenly love can engender is “images of virtue,” those images afforded by an education in wisdom (Sophia, not philosophia).

We find this point most vividly exemplified, perhaps, in the Phaedrus (251c), where there is as eloquent a description of passion for a beautiful boy as one could possibly imagine, but its consummation is purely through the eyes and the soul. No penises or other touching organs need
apply. In the Laws, moreover, Plato explicitly marks this as the love of a "philosophical pair," this love without sex, while the less philosophical, the lovers of time (honor) even at their most honorable, engage in sex sparingly (236a–d). Lest one imagine, moreover, that this is not being presented there as Socrates's "true" view, his behavior with Alcibiades as reported in the Symposium bears out this interpretation. Finally, in the passage on love in the Laws, we find the same dichotomy between the lover who loves with the body and the lover for whom the desire of the body is incidental (837b). By staging the opposition between Aspasia and Diotima, Plato is enacting precisely the opposition between the lover of bodies/time and the lover of souls/episteme. Aspasia versus Diotima equals Pericles versus Socrates, a binary opposition.60

This is a crucial point that is sometimes overlooked: The progress for the philosophers (or even for nascent philosophers) is not from bodies experienced corporally to souls experienced spiritually. Instead for those in the category of philosophers (from infancy, practically, or by accident of ill-birth; the alien, the ill), it is progress from bodies experienced spiritually to souls experienced spiritually, then to the Forms. Such philosophers do qualify themselves to be philosopher-kings or the leaders of philosophical academies, but not citizens of the democratic polis.61 The political body and the physically reproductive, sexual body are on one side of a line; the philosophical body that begets only in souls on the other. Foucault insists that Plato only "broached questions that would later have a very great importance for the transformation of this ethics into a morality of renunciation and for the constitution of a hermeneutics of desire," while Plato himself is "deeply rooted in the habitual themes of the ethics of pleasure."62 My reading tends to suggest, in contrast, that Plato is not only an unwitting catalyst for this transformation but its very agent provocateur, as it were, that in the Symposium (and in the Phaedrus) Plato sets up precisely that dividing line (the line of a binary opposition between body and soul) and thus already manifests some of the most significant components of a late-ancient erotics that we associated with Christianity.63

It seems to me, then, that Jowett was exactly right in his conclusion that Diotima

has taught him the want in the human creation of child's desire. As the after righteousness (compare Eph.) Christ and the el "fruitio Dei"; as a retire, so Plato's the love of know rather, perhaps, mysticism of the century before

My reading affir the Symposium (or more broadly, the sense that it is important in my not only not phe physical. The he entirely transform interaction of soul marked by Plato which, as we ha pederasty. Pedes socialization in the body's beauty community of cusions and de making babies, of appearance, r replaced by the it has anything to do with
has taught him that love is another aspect of philosophy. The same want in the human soul which is satisfied in the vulgar by the procreation of children, may become the highest aspiration of intellectual desire. As the Christian might speak of hungering and thirsting after righteousness; or of divine loves under the figure of human (compare Eph.: "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church"); as the mediaeval saint might speak of the "fructio Dei"; as Dante saw all things contained in his love of Beatrice, so Plato would have us absorb all other loves and desires in the love of knowledge. Here is the beginning of Neoplatonism, or rather, perhaps, a proof (of which there are many) that the so-called mysticism of the East was not strange to the Greek of the fifth century before Christ.\footnote{\textit{"My reading affirms the defensibility (if not more) of Jowett's conclusion that the \textit{Symposium} already strongly avows what will be a Christian (or more broadly, late ancient) theory of sexuality. Both Dover and Foucault are right in asserting that Platonic love is not grounded in a law in the sense that it will be for Jews and Christians. However, much more important in my view is the essential positing of a spiritual love that is not only not physical but in important ways directly opposed to the physical. The bottom line of the \textit{Symposium} is that Greek eros has been entirely transformed from the attraction to beautiful bodies into the interaction of souls through dialogue. Once again, rhetoric has been marked by Plato as the space of the specious, while Socrates's dialogue, which, as we have seen, is equally much a power play, has replaced pederasty. Pederasty becomes pedagogy. The break with the patterns of socialization in the Athenian polis is total. For Plato, it would seem, the body's beauty, as well as language's beauty, and the beauty of the community of ordinary human beings sharing views and reaching conclusions and decisions, as well as sharing bodily fluids and sometimes making babies, all belong to the realm of the false-seeming, the realm of appearance, the dreaded doxa, and all of them together are to be replaced by the eros of love of the Forms, \textit{epistème}. Whether or not this has anything to do with the mysticism of the East, it does have everything to do with the conceptions of the relations of the political body}}
to the spiritual one in late ancient Judeo-Christianity. Christian celibate eros—the eros, for instance, of a Jerome and a Paula—is neither the antithesis nor yet the product of heavenly Greek love, but finds its genealogy rather in the total break with sex and the city initiated by Platonic love.