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## The Significant Role of Speeches and Love

Plato's Symposium is not only a discourse on the subject of love, it is a tribute to Socrates and his way of life, and the entire course of the discussion is guided by the ultimate objective of presenting Socrates as the representation of love itself. Though this is done slowly and indirectly through a series of steps, Plato eventually makes clear his admiration of Socrates' way of life. This can then be compared not only to Socrates' method of convincing the others that his view of love is correct, but also to the process of the ascent of love. All the speeches are instrumental in the presentation of Socrates: the first few, though superficial and trivial in content, are important for the process of which they are a part; Diotima's speech is important because it establishes the basis for Socrates' representation of love; and lastly, Alcibiades' speech serves to complete the comparison.

The text begins as a series of speeches mainly about the benefits of love, but soon shifts to discussion on what exactly love is. All of the interlocutors express their thoughts on love in turn, and each attempts to do this in a manner that is flattering to himself and to his lifestyle. Drawing from personal beliefs and experiences, each man, ranging in profession from comedian to politician, proffers his opinion. Their views on love vary as much as their lifestyles, and hence, there is disagreement as to what exactly the accurate definition of love is. As each man speaks, he rebuts certain parts of the previous speaker's argument and builds upon certain other parts; the concept of love becomes increasingly broad and abstract. Dissent among the men, however, allows the reader both to view the progression and evolution of the meaning of love and to see the connection between this process and the process of love itself. According to Diotima, the process of love is by necessity, slow and careful, therefore the discovery of the meaning of love also must allow for the close examination and disproof of the erroneous beliefs of the opening speakers.

Plato uses the various speakers not only to present contrasting views, but also to create a process whereby these men are seeking knowledge. This process is paralleled by Diotima's description of love as a process—a continual search for beauty and wisdom, and an ascension of the soul. Her concept of love stands in stark contrast to that of all the others. She describes it principally as a desire to possess good things eternally. This desire necessitates the concomitant desire for immortality. When asked what it is that love wants, Diotima responds, "Reproduction and birth in beauty" (206E, 53). She continues, saying, "...Reproduction goes on forever; it is what mortals have in place of immortality. A lover must desire immortality along with the good, if what we agreed earlier was right, that Love wants to possess the good forever. It follows that Love must desire immortality" (206E-207A, 54). One cannot possess something forever unless one is immortal—that much is obvious. For humans though, immortality can only

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be achieved through reproduction. There is both physical and mental reproduction though, and one can be pregnant in both body and soul. One can live on not only through children, but also, more significantly, through lasting ideas. Here, Diotima builds on Pausanias' idea of "heavenly" and "common" love, attributing physical offspring to "common" love and intellectual or spiritual offspring as "heavenly" love.

Socrates' rejection of Alcibiades' offer relates directly to this principle. As the representation of the more elevated, heavenly love, Socrates seeks to reproduce through ideas, and rejects the physical aspects of common love. What Alcibiades in effect is asking for, is his lower love for Socrates' higher love-- "gold in exchange for bronze" (219A, 70). Socrates though, sees the inequality of such an exchange saying, "You [Alcibiades] can see in me a beauty that is beyond description and makes your own remarkable good looks pale in comparison. But is this then a fair exchange...?" (218E, 70). Alcibiades, however, demonstrates a love for Socrates that is of a higher level than the mere physical love, which is what he himself has to offer. Alcibiades loves Socrates not only for his wisdom, but also because he believes that Socrates can make him a better person through the reproduction of his beautiful ideas. Alcibiades is therefore seeking not only wisdom, but also more importantly, immortality. If Socrates were to accept Alcibiades offer though, he would not be living up to the image of the heavenly love. This then necessitates that he reject Alcibiades' offer. Alcibiades' attempt to seduce Socrates though, is his expression of love?his attempt to achieve immortality.

In order to gain this immortality though, one must reach the highest level of love. Diotima describes the process of attaining this level, saying:

One always goes upwards for the sake of this Beauty, starting out from beautiful things and 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... When he looks at Beauty in the only way that Beauty can be seen?only then will it become possible for him to give birth not to images of virtue (because he's in touch with no images), but to true virtue (because he's in touch with the true Beauty). The love of the gods belongs to anyone who has given birth to true virtue and nourished it, and if any human being could be immortal, it would be he.

-- Symposium, 211C-212B, 59-60

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Because love's ultimate goal is immortality, Diotima describes it as a process, whereby one's appreciation and desire for beauty ascend from merely that of the physical to the intellectual and finally to the mystical. Only upon scaling the final level of love, however, is one able to become immortal, and this level can only be scaled if one moves away from the base love of the physical to a love of the sharing, or reproduction, of ideas. This is exactly what Alcibiades attempts to do in pursuing Socrates. Before this one cannot experience the essence of beauty, but rather, only see images of it. Only after experiencing true beauty, beauty that cannot be seen with the eyes, can any other true beauty be reproduced. This then is immortality.

Because love desires good things such as immortality, beauty, and wisdom, and because people do not desire that which they already have, Diotima reasons that love is none of those things. This once again relates love to the lover and Socrates, rather than the beloved, as previous speakers had done. In the arguments presented by Phaedrus, Pausanias, and Eryximachus, love was entirely good and beautiful; it was representative of the beloved. Diotima, however, asserts that love is neither beautiful nor wise nor immortal. Love, in all aspects, instead lies between the two ends of the spectrum, and is in constant pursuit of these traits. This therefore, likens it to the lover, and therefore, Socrates.

Socrates ultimately proves to be the exemplar of love. He is, in every manner, as love should be. As love, he seeks immortality, beauty, and wisdom, but is in possession of none of these. This necessitates that he speak through Diotima, because in this manner, she is the one in possession of the knowledge and not he himself. As a philosopher, however, he seeks this wisdom, which is also a form of beauty. Similarly, he must reject Alcibiades' physical offer because he seeks immortality through the reproduction of his ideas; this is true love and true beauty?the only path to immortality. Finally, just as Diotima describes love as a "...messenger who [shuttles] back and forth between [god and mortal]... [rounding] out the whole and [binding] fast the all to all" (203A, 47), so Socrates also acts as a sort of transit between Diotima and the interlocutors at the symposium. He conveys her wisdom and knowledge concerning love, and in doing so, reproduces the immortal ideas. In the end, love is synonymous with Socrates, and immortality with philosophy and reproduction of beautiful thoughts.

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