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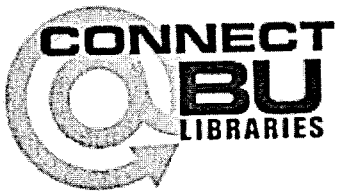

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Philosophy and Empire: On Socrates and Alcibiades in Plato's *Symposium**

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When Socrates was accused in 399 BC of corrupting the young, the harm that his one-time associate Alcibiades did to Athens provided fuel for the charges against him. By setting the Symposium *in 416 BC, just one year before Alcibiades led Athens on the disastrous Sicilian expedition, Plato revisits the charge that Socrates corrupts the young. In particular, does Socrates' freedom from the accepted opinions of his city and the "universalism" of the truth he pursues find political expression in imperialistic ambitions such as Alcibiades'? Exploring the role of Alcibiades in the* Symposium, *including his "praise" of Socrates, I argue that Socratic philosophy properly understood is a "middle" state (e.g., between ignorance and wisdom), and as such cannot represent an escape from one's particular political community into imperialistic politics. Moreover, as a middle state it is characterized by reciprocity, and as such offers a model for political life different from Alcibiades' imperialism.*
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Introduction

For more than a decade before Athens' fall to Sparta in 405 BC, Alcibiades dominated Athenian politics. He led the disastrous Sicilian invasion in 415, betrayed Athens and advised Sparta in its war against Athens, and intrigued against both cities with the King of Persia (Thucydides, 6.6.2, 6.88.9, 6.93.1–2,

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8.46.1–47.1). Plato reveals Alcibiades' imperialistic ambitions in *Alcibiades I*, specifically, his desire to acquire power over the whole world (*Alcibiades I*, 105a–e). Dashing, daring, and unscrupulous, this talented Athenian contributed to his city's final defeat in the Peloponnesian War and its subsequent decline. Alcibiades' actions later fueled the charges brought against Socrates in 399 BC for corrupting the young (Xenophon, *Memorabilia* I. ii.12). Seth Benardete speculates that had Alcibiades not led Athens to disaster in Sicily, which ultimately led to the city's defeat in the war with Sparta, Socrates might not have been brought to trial, found guilty, and executed.[1] Although Plato records Socrates' defense of his philosophic way of life in his *Apology of Socrates*, that defense did not persuade a majority of his judges. Could there be any truth in these charges (see *Apology*, 20c)? In particular, might there be a connection between Socratic philosophy and imperialism?

Scholars raise the question whether Socrates may have contributed to Alcibiades' betrayal of his city by attenuating his attachment to its laws and conventions. Allan Bloom, for example, suggests that Socrates' questions "liberate[d] Alcibiades from loyalty to his own city" and that "[Alcibiades'] political activities were probably informed by what he learned from Socrates."[2] Lutz similarly questions whether Socrates undermined Alcibiades' law-abidingness.[3] In the *Republic*, Socrates himself describes those who "taste arguments when young," learn to contradict, and refute others by imitating those by whom they themselves were refuted. Such individuals no longer believe those opinions they once held honorable and not finding true ones "become lawless" (*paranomos*) (*Republic*, 538d–39a). In the *Apology* Socrates admits that young men imitated his refuting others and thereby caused resentment against him (*Apology*, 24d–25c). And in his *Memorabilia*, Xenophon records how Alcibiades catches Pericles in contradictions about the meaning of law (I.ii. 40–46). The freedom from accepted opinions and the conventions of the day produced by philosophical questioning might liberate an individual from political restraints. Alcibiades' lack of good citizenship, from this perspective, is a reflection of Socrates' independence from the city. Transcending the political has political implications.

Moreover, one might connect Alcibiades' "universal ambitions" with the universal ambitions of philosophy in its pursuit of the truth. Not simply the liberating character of philosophy but its goals and aspirations might find tyrannical expression in a politics of empire. Bloom points us to this possibility in

1. Seth Benardete, "On Plato's *Symposium*," in Plato's *Symposium*, trans. Seth Benardete with commentaries by Allan Bloom and Seth Benardete (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 192.

2. Allan Bloom, "The Ladder of Love," in Plato's *Symposium*, 166.

3. Mark J. Lutz, *Socrates' Education to Virtue: Learning the Love of the Noble* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 127.

his interpretation of the *Symposium*, the only work in which Plato portrays Socrates' meeting the mature Alcibiades and which Plato sets only one year before the fateful Sicilian expedition. In contrast to the more typical interpretations that contrast the purity of Socrates' love of the Ideas with Alcibiades' passion for the world,[4] Bloom writes that the "Alcibiadean vision of politics seems like a political version" of the "vision of the Ideas and the beautiful."[5] This argument points to the universality of outlook that the two have in common, whether it be the imperialistic drive that ignores the laws and customs of particular peoples or the love of the truth that leads a philosopher beyond the opinions of his time and place.

In this essay, I explore the connection between Socratic philosophy and empire by examining Plato's portrayal in the *Symposium* of the relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades. Contrary to the view of the freedom and universalism of Socratic philosophizing that dominates the scholarship, I argue that Socratic philosophizing captures for Plato the imperfect human condition, needy yet also resourceful. In between ignorance and wisdom, Socrates is skeptical of "universal" visions, inasmuch as they presume a realization of wisdom. Yet he also understands, and tries to convey to others, the requirements of a good human life. In an "in-between" state, he depends on others for sustenance and nurtures them in turn. Plato shows in the *Symposium*, I argue, that

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4. This is true of both the traditional interpretations that understand Alcibiades' presence in the *Symposium* to exonerate Socrates from the charge of corrupting Alcibiades and more recent scholars who are critical of Socrates' love of the universal. Among the first group, George Kimball Plochmann argues that Alcibiades serves as a foil for Socrates, a "clarification of what philosophy is *not*," "Hiccups and Hangovers in *The Symposium*," *Bucknell Review*, 11 (May 1963): 16; see also 14; Paul Friedlander, *Plato: The Dialogues, Second and Third Periods*, vol. 3, trans. Hans Meyerhoff (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 30, 32; R. G. Bury, *The Symposium of Plato* (Cambridge: W. Heffner and Sons, 1969), lii.; William S. Cobb, *The Symposium and the Phaedrus: Plato's Erotic Dialogues* (Albany, New York: The State University Press, 1993), 82–84; Gary Alan Scott, "Irony and Inebriation in Plato's *Symposium*: The Disagreement Between Socrates and Alcibiades over Truth-telling," *Journal of Neoplatonic Studies* 3 (Spring 1995): 30 n5; and Gary Alan Scott and William A. Welton, "An Overlooked Motive in Alcibiades' *Symposium* Speech," *Interpretation* 24 (Fall 1996): 67–84. Among the latter group of scholars, Stanley Rosen describes "the peculiarity of Socrates' Eros, which can only desire divine things or beings," *Plato's Symposium* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 2nd edition, 279, and Gregory Vlastos and Martha Nussbaum argue that Socrates is able to love only the good qualities that humans share (e.g., the beautiful itself) rather than the whole person, Vlastos, "The individual as object of love in Plato's dialogues," *Platonic Studies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 1–34, and Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 190. Criticizing Socratic philosophizing in light of the more human, more vibrant alternative she finds in Alcibiades, Nussbaum contrasts Socrates' "attentiveness to . . . repeatable qualities" with Alcibiades' "attentiveness to the particular, to unique persons," *Fragility of Goodness*, 193. See also Arlene Saxonhouse, *Fear of Diversity: The Birth of Political Science in Ancient Greek Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 159–60 and 183–84. For a perceptive argument against the interpretations of Vlastos and Nussbaum, see Joseph P. Lawrence, "Socrates and Alcibiades," *Southern Humanities Review* 37 (Fall 2003): 301–27.

5. Bloom, "The Ladder of Love," 166. See Hegel's discussion of the connection between the Ideas and freedom, in Georg Wilhelm Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane and Francis H. Simson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), vol. I, 385–88, 406–07.

Alcibiades misunderstands Socrates and his philosophical way of life. The "in-between" character of philosophy, and the reciprocity that it necessitates, properly understood, is antithetical to imperialism and thereby offers a more promising model for political life than Alcibiades' pursuit of empire. My argument proceeds by examining, first, the portrait of Socrates that Alcibiades draws in the *Symposium*, both the images he gives of Socrates and the virtues that he attributes to him, and then Plato's portrayal of Alcibiades in that dialogue.

Alcibiades' Socrates

Alcibiades' Images of Socrates

Alcibiades' contribution to the symposium, a drinking party at the home of tragic poet Agathon, is an encomium to Socrates, although it is "praise mixed with blame" (222a).[6] He offers the guests "likenesses" or "images" of Socrates, which may seem to be "for raising a laugh," but aim at "truth, not laughter." Alcibiades is at the height of political power in Athens, and tonight he is playing the role of a poet in presenting Socrates through images. Socrates competes with comic poet Aristophanes and tragedian Agathon in describing Love (175e, 205e), but Alcibiades, whose speech draws "images" of Socrates (215a), competes with Plato himself.[7] Alcibiades first compares Socrates to the statues of Silenus, an old man in Greek myth with the ears of a horse. Both Socrates and Silenus have ugly exteriors. And when the statues of Silenus are "split open into two," there are images of gods within. So too does Socrates, Alcibiades says, hide within himself images "divine and golden, altogether beautiful and wondrous" (216d–17a, 222a).

Socrates' "Silenus" guise, according to Alcibiades, is twofold. In the first place, Socrates pretends to love beautiful young men, disguising himself as a lover. However, he is in fact "full of moderation" and contemns all the things most people pursue (216d–e). In the second place, Socrates conceals his wisdom. His speeches "resemble the sculptured Silenus when they are opened." While Socrates talks about smiths, cobblers, and tanners, and claims that he is "ignorant and knows nothing" (221d–e, 216d), when opened his speeches are intelligent and contain "everything proper to examine for one who would be noble and

6. References in parentheses, unless otherwise noted, are to Plato's *Symposium*. Translations from the Greek are my own, although I have relied on Seth Benardete's translation in Plato's *Symposium*. The Greek texts for all references to Plato can be found in John Burnet, ed., *Platonic Opera*, 5 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1900–07.

7. Nussbaum also notes this connection between Alcibiades and Plato. She suggests not a competition between Alcibiades and Plato but that Alcibiades serves as "a poet, and an inspiring god of poets (Plato?)," *Fragility of Goodness*, 193.

good" (222a). Alcibiades admits that he himself was deceived in thinking Socrates his lover, and supposing that by giving Socrates sexual favors, he would be able "to hear" all that Socrates "knows" (217a). That is, Alcibiades hoped to gain access to Socrates' hidden wisdom. Alcibiades knows that there is something strange about Socrates' love, for Socrates does not desire him in the way that his other lovers do (see 215a and also *Alcibiades I*, 104d). And Alcibiades senses that Socrates knows something in spite of his claim to ignorance. However, he supposes that something that is not empty is full, and someone who is not ignorant is wise.[8] He therefore concludes that both Socrates' eroticism and his claim to ignorance are disguises, external coverings that hide beautiful things within—moderation and wisdom. He arrived at the symposium too late to hear Socrates' recounting his lessons about Love from Diotima, and her correction of Socrates' youthful belief that if Love is neither ugly nor bad, it must be beautiful and good, and that if someone is not ignorant, he must be wise (201e–02a).

Alcibiades likens Socrates not only to Silenus but also to the satyr Marsyas: as the satyr charms and possesses human beings by means of his flute, so too does Socrates ravish those who hear him by means of his speeches. When Alcibiades hears Socrates' speeches, he confesses, his "heart leaps and tears pour out." Indeed, even now, he must stop his ears against Socrates' words, for they practically paralyze him with shame for his way of life (215c–16b; see also *Alcibiades I*, 132b–c).[9] The relation between Alcibiades' two images of Socrates, as Silenus and as Marsyas, is somewhat obscure. If the outer covering of Socrates' speeches is ugly and off-putting—his speech about lowly shoemakers and tanners, and his deceptive claim to ignorance—how does Socrates so ravish his listeners? While Socrates' snub nose and protruding eyes may conceal a beautiful soul, Alcibiades does not emphasize these physical features of Socrates as part of his deceptive covering (215b), but rather Socrates' deeds and speeches. For Alcibiades, Socrates deeds (acting like a lover) and his speeches (his discussion of cobblers and tanners and his claim to ignorance) are the ugly outer cover. However, deeds and speeches may be the manifestations of one's soul as well as its cover. When Alcibiades splits Socrates into two to find beautiful images inside, he throws aside the deceptive and ugly covering. Only the inside matters. And there is no likeness between the two, only difference.

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8. In the *Alcibiades II*, Alcibiades denies that there is "some third condition in the middle of being wise and unwise, that makes a person neither one nor the other" (*Alcibiades II*, 139a–b). Whoever the dialogue's author (many scholars think that the *Alcibiades II* was not written by Plato), he understood this important problem in Alcibiades' thinking. See also the "arguments" of the sophistical brothers in the *Euthydemus* (276a–c).

9. Although Alcibiades does not mention it, Marsyas' flute-playing did not have a happy outcome: after competing and losing in a music contest with Apollo, the god slew the satyr for his hubris. Whether Alcibiades intends it or not, his image of Socrates is ominous.

Looking for the esoteric Socrates beneath the surface, Alcibiades understands Socrates' claim of ignorance simply as part of the false cover, not as Socrates' wisdom. He thus sees nothing true in Socrates' irony, which he understands simply as a deceptive claim to ignorance (216c, 218c; see also *Republic*, 337a) rather than as a way of speaking appropriate to one aware of his condition between ignorance and wisdom. Again, for Alcibiades, there is no middle.[10] There is only the ugly outer covering, the claim to ignorance, and the beautiful images of virtue within. The cover illustrates deficiency; inside, Socrates is "full" (216c).

When Alcibiades proposes to yield sexual favors to Socrates in return for his wisdom (217a), Socrates denies that he has any such wisdom as Alcibiades supposes. Leo Strauss brings up the possibility that "Socrates has no hidden business, no hidden knowledge. Those beautiful statues within Socrates, of which Alcibiades spoke, are equally accessible to all through Socrates' speeches."[11] This possibility finds support in Socrates' claim in the *Apology* that he is in effect an open book—available to all to hear, rich and poor alike—and that anyone who claims that he heard something in private from him is not telling the truth (*Apology*, 33a–b). Of course, one must understand Socrates' speeches before their beauty becomes accessible. Contrary to Alcibiades, esotericism is not the wisdom hidden by the false covering, but the meaning of the appearances of things, including what one hears Socrates say. Since Alcibiades rejects any truth in Socrates' claim to ignorance, he understands Socrates' irony only as a mockery of human beings (216e).[12] Consequently, he supposes that Socrates refuses to share with him what he knows. When Alcibiades offers to accept Socrates as his lover, Alcibiades recounts, Socrates shows no interest in sex, but responds that they "will in the future, after deliberating, do whatever seems best to us two (in the dual) about these and other things" (219a–b). Alcibiades sees only a rejection in Socrates' response, not an offer of a different sort of relationship. He quotes Socrates' speaking of the two of them in the dual—the Greek form that designates a pair—but shows no signs of grasping its significance as neither singular nor plural, but something that lies between the two. Alcibiades' likening Socrates to Silenus' statues and his language of "opening" obscure more than they reveal. Their implied violence in fact reveals more about Alcibiades than about Socrates.

Not surprisingly, Alcibiades understands love in terms of ruling and being ruled, referring to Socrates' "wondrous power" and his own "abject slavery" to Socrates (215e, 216c and 219e). When he begins to pursue Socrates, he imagines

10. As Lutz comments, "According to Alcibiades, Socrates' response to his offer was very 'ironic,' by which Alcibiades seems to mean that it was joking and playful and false," *Socrates' Education to Virtue*, 135. Rosen, however, praises Alcibiades' "brilliant description of Socrates' irony," *Plato's Symposium*, 309.

11. Leo Strauss, *On Plato's Symposium* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 273.

12. See also Lawrence, "Socrates and Alcibiades," 311.

that the roles of beloved and lover have been merely reversed (217a–9c, 222b, 213c; *Alcibiades I*, 135d);[13] he has no conception of the reciprocal relation Socrates proposes when he speaks of their deliberating about what is good for them (219a). Pointing to Alcibiades' language of domination and submission throughout his speech, Scott observes of Alcibiades, "if he is not the master he must be the slave. Feeling enslaved to Socrates, Alcibiades tries to dominate him."[14] If there is no middle between emptiness and fullness, love can be only domination and subjection. There is no space for reciprocity. Only in-betweens can both love and be loved (see *Lysis*, 40d–e).

Just as Socrates' attachment to him eludes Alcibiades' understanding of love, so too do Socrates' conversations with others elude Alcibiades' understanding of speech. Alcibiades compares Socrates as speaker to "Pericles and other good rhetoricians whom he believes spoke well," but who did not have the same effect on him as Socrates did. He thus knows there is a difference between Socrates and the others, but he does not grasp the distinction that Socrates makes in the *Gorgias* between rhetoric and dialogue (*Gorgias*, 448e). He describes the ravishing character of Socrates' speeches in a way similar to Socrates' description in the *Protagoras* of lengthy rhetorical displays as opposed to the briefer give and take of a conversation (*Protagoras*, 336c–d).[15] He supposes that he can simply "hear" what Socrates knows (217a).[16] He more often refers to Socrates' "speeches" than to his conversations or "dialogues" (see 213e, 215c–e, 218a, 221d–e, 222a).[17] He does not reveal as much knowledge of Socrates as does Phaedrus, who warns the company of Socrates' preference for conversation lest

13. For discussion, see Rosen, *Plato's Symposium*, 289; David M. Halperin, "Plato and Erotic Reciprocity," *Classical Antiquity* 5 (1989): 68–70; Gary Alan Scott, *Plato's Socrates as Educator* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 48; and Daniel E. Anderson, *The Masks of Dionysus* (Albany: State University Press, 1993), 123.

14. See Scott's excellent analysis of the ways in which Plato presents Socrates' understanding of love as a subversion of the traditional opposition between lover and beloved, ruling and being ruled, in *Plato's Socrates as Educator*, 121–34. As Scott points out, Socrates' response to Alcibiades' proposition of exchange of sexual favors for wisdom accuses Alcibiades of the desire to dominate: since you are proposing to exchange bronze for gold, Socrates tells Alcibiades, "you're planning to gain an advantage (*pleonektein*) over me" (218e), in *Plato's Socrates as Educator*, 124; see also Schein, "Alcibiades and the Politics of Misguided Love in Plato's *Symposium*," *Theta Pi* 3 (1974), 158–67, and Anderson, *The Masks of Dionysus*, 114, 122. After Alcibiades stops speaking in the *Symposium*, Socrates claims that Alcibiades is still trying to get the better of him (222d).

15. The young Alcibiades is present in the *Protagoras* when Socrates makes this distinction, and even supports Socrates' preference for conversation over lengthy speeches (*Protagoras*, 336b–d; see also *Protagoras*, 347b, 348b). Rosen understands Alcibiades' remarks in the *Protagoras* to indicate that the young Alcibiades is more open to Socrates than the man who appears in the *Symposium*, *Plato's Symposium*, 285.

16. Anderson, *The Masks of Dionysus*, 116.

17. Alcibiades uses "conversing" in reference to Socrates' speeches only at 217b, where he admits that he expected Socrates to "converse" with him as a lover would with his darling, although Socrates conversed with him in his usual manner.

Socrates' discussion with Agathon supersede the speechmaking that was the agreed-upon entertainment for the evening (194d).

Alcibiades even insists that like Marsyas' tunes Socrates' speeches can be reproduced by anyone with the same effect, "even if he be a poor speaker," and regardless of "whether the hearer be a woman, man, or lad." All are "struck out [of their minds] and possessed" (215b–e). He assumes that Socrates' conversations can be simply conveyed from one speaker to another, as if the individual Socrates addresses makes no contribution of his own to the dialogue (see also *Lysis*, 211a).[18] It is therefore not surprising that he fears that engaging Socrates means a life of idleness or passivity, "sitting beside him until he grows old." He consequently "stops his ears as if from Sirens and runs away" (216a–b). If Alcibiades were correct about the effect of Socrates' speeches, he would be correct to run away as if from the Sirens, who promise knowledge to those who hear their song while in fact enticing them to their deaths (*Iliad* 12. 184–91; see *Euthydemus*, 283d–e).[19]

Rosen also points out that Alcibiades does not fully understand Socratic dialogue: "Alcibiades had said that Socrates always wins in speech (213e3); for him, the Eros of dialectic is essentially eristic.. . . [Alcibiades] does not give us an

18. Alcibiades claims that Socrates' speeches possess him and others just as the worshippers of Cybele, the Corybantes, are inspired by wild music and frenzied dancing (215e). In the *Ion*, Socrates refers to the Corybantes to illustrate the effect of the poet's divine inspiration, which acts like a magnet, drawing first the poets, then the rhapsodes and actors, and then their audiences (*Ion*, 533d–36b; see also Lawrence, "Socrates and Alcibiades, 318). Of the inspired poets Socrates says that they are "out of their senses (*ekphrōn*)," and that "the god takes away their mind (*nous*)" (534b, c). Similarly, as Socrates describes them here the rhapsodes and actors may act as "middles" between the poet and audience (536a), but they make no independent contribution to the process. The medium is not the message; in fact, it must be nothing at all. Socrates' interlocutor Ion, a rhapsode with an affinity for Homer, however, remains unconvinced, and "would wonder if [Socrates] could speak well enough to persuade him that he is 'possessed' when he praises Homer" (536d). Perhaps he perceives that if inspiration were as Socrates describes it, he could be equally inspired by all poets, not just Homer in particular (but consider *Ion*, 534b). In any case, Socrates' speeches fail to "possess" their hearer, at least when they maintain his possession by an outside source (cf. *Crito*, 54d, 46b). Consider also *Alcibiades I* for Alcibiades' denial and Socrates' insistence that the one who answers questions is responsible for the conclusions reached (*Alcibiades I*, 106c, 109b–c, 112d, 113a). Alcibiades uses the Greek *ego* no fewer than seven times between 112e and 113b.

19. Bloom substantiates Alcibiades' "image of Socrates as the sorcerer" by reference to "the golden speeches of Socrates [that] can be found all over Plato's dialogues," such as his "great speech about divine madness in the *Phaedrus*" and his speech about Love in the *Symposium*, "The Ladder of Love," 159. We should also note, however, that those two speeches address previous speeches in the works in which Socrates delivers them, and are therefore part of a dialogue. Moreover, those speeches each give way to further conversation (212c and *Phaedrus*, 256c ff.). Finally, Socrates' *Symposium* speech, like the *Symposium* itself, includes narration of dialogue. If one were to narrate (or dramatize) the dialogue itself, with Socrates responding to particular interlocutors, one could preserve for a larger audience the dialogic character of Socrates' speeches and therewith the crucial role of the particular addressee. Plato thus differs from Alcibiades in demanding by means of his dialogic form that we take a middle step in understanding any "repetition" of a Socratic speech, inasmuch as it is addressed to a particular individual or group of individuals.

adequate example of dialectic."[20] However, Rosen understands the "self-neglect" of which Socrates accuses Alcibiades (215c–16b) to be "a form of selfishness which makes him run away rather than surrender to the selflessness of logos [speech, reason, argument]." For Alcibiades to follow the logic of the argument and to accept and obey its conclusions, according to Rosen, would be "a selfless defeat."[21] Rosen thus suggests that whereas Alcibiades misunderstands speech as selfish (for the sake of victory over another), speech is in fact selfless, something to which the eristic Alcibiades will not surrender. From this perspective, there appears no middle ground between the demands of the argument and our self-love. However, it may not be as easy to speak of the selflessness of dialogue as of the selflessness of "logos."

If dialogue is simply an instance of speech, then what pertains to speech pertains to dialogue. And one gives oneself to the argument, whether it emerges in conversation or in the speech of a rhetorician. On the other hand, speech always implies dialogue, in the sense that speech is never abstract but always to another (even those speaking to themselves must imagine themselves as divided into speaker and listener in order to do so).[22] Even if one speaks to someone who listens silently rather than takes part in a discussion, the speaker takes his listener into account, as he imagines his listener taking it in. Because speech is always directed to someone, speech itself is an instance of dialogue, however one-sided and partial any particular instance may be. Dialogue thus makes manifest the contribution of the other person or persons, something that rhetoric can too easily obscure. When Socrates proposes that he and Alcibiades deliberate together about what is best for the two of them, he is not asking Alcibiades to surrender himself to the argument or the speech, but offering him a part. The problem the pair face is not that Alcibiades must give up his part, but that Alcibiades is not satisfied by any mere part (see, e.g., 213e, 214c–d; *Alcibiades I*, 104e–05c). After proposing the exchange of Socrates' wisdom for his sexual favors, Alcibiades asked Socrates to consider what was best for the two of them, but Alcibiades' proposition indicated that he himself had already decided for them (cf. 219a, 218c).[23] When Socrates responded in the dual—that after deliberating they would do whatever looked best to the two of them (219b)—he was not only offering a part to Alcibiades but claiming one for himself.

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20. Rosen, *Plato's Symposium*, 309.

21. Rosen, *Plato's Symposium*, 300.

22. See Michael Davis, *The Autobiography of Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 70.

23. See Rosen's discussion of Alcibiades' euphemism in this passage, *Plato's Symposium*, 307, as well as Anderson's observation that Socrates "in his reply ignores the submissiveness of the *eromenos* [beloved] implied in this passage," *The Masks of Dionysus*, 122–23.

Alcibiades' Praise of Socrates' Virtues

Most impressed by what he understands as Socrates' superiority to his own charms, Alcibiades presents Socrates' virtues in terms of "endurance" of painful situations rather than of any positive enjoyment of good things (219d, 220a).[24] Socrates' greatest virtue, according to Alcibiades, is his moderation, which causes him to "have no care for beauty, and to despise wealth, and any honor held blessed by the multitude" (216d–e). Alcibiades describes Socrates' endurance of hardship during military campaigns, including inclement weather and lack of food, and his ability to drink without becoming intoxicated. He compares Socrates to Ajax, whom Homer presents as good in defense, at warding off the enemy rather than in pursuit, in contrast to Achilles, who was good at both (219e; see *Republic*, 375a). As to Socrates' particular acts of courage, Alcibiades praises Socrates' saving his life at Potidaea. Alcibiades understands the episode to further indicate Socrates' resistance and self-abnegation, for Socrates refused the prize for valor that Alcibiades urged the generals to give him, and insisted that it be given to Alcibiades instead. Finally, Alcibiades sees Socrates' courage in his self-control in the retreat at Delium, in his being "in his senses" or "collected" (221a). It is here that Alcibiades quotes the *Clouds*, for Socrates walked "strutting like a pelican, his eyes darting from side to side" (221b; *Clouds*, 362). Indeed, Alcibiades appears to be describing Aristophanes' Socrates more than the Socrates of Plato's dialogues. Like Aristophanes, Alcibiades presents Socrates as ascetic, unerotic, and characterized by endurance (see *Clouds*, 415–17, 439–42, 737). His virtues, as Alcibiades presents them, are indistinguishable from his hubris (215b, 217e, 219c, 220b, 222a).

When Socrates discusses courage with Laches and Nicias in the dialogue bearing the name of the former, Laches defines courage as endurance. Socrates responds that if endurance alone is courage, courage might be identical with folly (*Laches*, 192d). He there objects to a position about courage that Alcibiades appears to hold in the *Symposium*.[25] In the *Laches*, it is Nicias who argues that courage is knowledge, claiming that he derives his understanding of courage from previous conversations with Socrates (*Laches*, 194c–d). Plato's Alcibiades has had previous conversations with Socrates (216a; see also *Alcibiades I*), but the word for knowledge never occurs in Alcibiades' speech about Socrates. It is one of Plato's ironies, at Alcibiades' expense, that he attributes to Alcibiades' political opponent Nicias (see e.g., Thucydides 6.15.2), the elderly and cautious Athenian

24. Strauss observes that in his description of Socrates Alcibiades collapses moderation, which "has to do with the right attitude toward pleasure," and endurance, which involves "the right attitude toward pains." For Alcibiades "this virtue [endurance] swallows up everything," in Strauss, *On Plato's Symposium*, 274.

25. Rosen, *Plato's Symposium*, 315.

general and statesman, a fuller understanding of Socrates than to Alcibiades (see also *Laches*, 187e–88a).

Alcibiades is not entirely silent, however, about Socrates' life of inquiry or philosophy. In fact, he introduces Socrates' philosophic heroics in Homeric language, revealing what the "strong man did and dared" (220c; *Odyssey* IV, 242).[26] Having "gotten a thought, Socrates stood on the same spot from dawn on, considering it, and making no progress would not let up," not moving until the following dawn. Alcibiades both admires and resents the self-sufficiency he attributes to Socrates. Consequently, he ridicules it. Ionian soldiers in the Athenian army, after they finished their dinner, brought out their bedding—for it was summer—and slept outside to find out if Socrates would stand all night. Alcibiades presents Socrates' philosophical life as a silent show for dozing soldiers. His image of Socrates rivals Aristophanes' image of him suspended in a basket investigating the heavens (*Clouds*, 218–32). Like Aristophanes' Socrates, Alcibiades' Socrates thinks by himself, rather than through his conversations with others. Alcibiades makes philosophy into a test of endurance (see 219e). He promises to reveal Socrates' inner beauties, but he sees little more than do the Ionian soldiers. At the outset of his speech, he claims that his images of Socrates are meant to reveal the truth, not to provoke laughter (215a). However, when he finishes speaking, as Aristodemus reports, there is laughter (222c). He competes only with Aristophanes, not with Plato.

Alcibiades' presentation of Socrates' virtues thus stems from his belief that Socrates' ugly exterior hides beautiful things within, that Socrates' self-presentation as a lover hides his moderation, and that his claim to ignorance hides his wisdom. Socrates' virtues are, in sum, those of a self-sufficient man, who consequently disdains those things the majority of human beings pursue, such as wealth, honor, and beauty. Socrates is self-contained, affected neither by summer nor winter, for example, or by whether his drink is water or unadulterated wine (220a–b). His courage is most obvious in retreat, and his thinking renders him

26. The phrase from Homer with which Alcibiades describes Socrates is used by Helen to describe Odysseus, when he disguised himself as a lowly beggar in order to sneak into Troy undetected. As Helen recounts, she was the only one able to recognize Odysseus, who eventually admits to her who he is and tells her "all the purpose of the Achaeans." No doubt that analogy appeals to Alcibiades inasmuch as the disguised Odysseus reveals himself and his secrets to the one who penetrates his disguise. However, Plato's irony may be again at Alcibiades' expense: in his pride (in seeing through appearances) Alcibiades compares himself to a woman who first betrays her people and escapes to Troy, and then by not revealing Odysseus' disguise betrays the Trojans in turn (*Odyssey* IV, 242–62). Like Alcibiades, Helen is a double traitor. Helen seems even ready to betray the Greek cause again when their army hides within the "Trojan" horse: in the words of her husband Menelaus, Helen is "moved by some divine spirit" to circle the hollow horse imitating the voices of the wives of the men within. The men, including Menelaus himself, have to be restrained by Odysseus from rushing out to their deaths at the sound of Helen's calls (*Odyssey* IV, 271–89). In recounting this episode, Menelaus thus indicates Odysseus' immunity from Helen's Siren-like charms that captivate his fellow Greeks.

immobile. If justice is a virtue that involves one's relations with others, it is not surprising that Alcibiades does not think to attribute it to Socrates. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle says that we do not attribute justice to the gods (1178b10–15). What sort of contracts would gods make, Aristotle asks, or to whom would they return what is due (1178b10–12)? Alcibiades views Socrates as if he were godlike.

Alcibiades concludes his speech with reference to the pain rather than the pleasure that comes to him from his association with Socrates. Indeed, he warns Agathon not to be deceived by Socrates' pretense to be his lover, and thus not to suffer what he and many others have suffered (222b). The alternative to a painful relation with Socrates for him is not a pleasant one, but avoidance. He has seen in Socrates primarily the virtue of endurance, and it is not one that he finds attractive.

Plato's Alcibiades

Plato presents Alcibiades' encomium to Socrates as the last of a group of speeches delivered by a distinguished company of Athenians, including the comic poet Aristophanes, the tragedian Agathon, and Socrates himself. Alcibiades is not present, however, for their speeches, since he crashes the party quite late, quite drunk, supported by a flute-girl, and accompanied by other carousers (212d–e). Once he arrives he dominates the gathering, just as he dominates memory of the event. Although he does not appear in Plato's work until its last quarter, a group of anonymous individuals even a decade or so after the event occurs want to hear about "the party that brought together Agathon and Socrates and Alcibiades and the others" (172a–b).

The intoxicated Alcibiades comes to Agathon's party wearing a wreath of ivy and violets. His resemblance to the god Dionysus has long been noted.[27] In Euripides' *Bacchae*, for example, Dionysus is also crowned with ivy (*Bacchae*, 81–82).[28] Earlier in the evening, the group referred to Dionysus in his role as the god of the theater (175e, 177e). By dressing Alcibiades as the god Dionysus, Plato suggests that this leading political figure of Athens makes his city into a theatrical spectacle. Moreover, Dionysus is also the god of wine, and just as Dionysus in the *Bacchae* intoxicates the city of Thebes to join in his worship (*Bacchae*, 24–26, 186–88, 204–05, 221, 278–83), Alcibiades enjoins everyone at the symposium to

27. Helen Bacon, "Socrates Crowned," *Virginia Quarterly Review* 35 (1959): 424; John Anton, "Some Dionysian References in the Platonic Dialogues," *Classical Journal* 58 (1962–1963): 50; Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 194; Benardete, "On Plato's *Symposium*," 91; Lutz, *Socrates' Education to Virtue*, 131. At 218b, Alcibiades speaks of "a philosophic madness and bacchic frenzy" that possesses him. He understands philosophy, or at least his own experience of it, in terms of the god Dionysus.

28. Rosen, *Plato's Symposium*, 287 n35.

drink (213e).[29] He is a man who intoxicates the gathering when he joins it, just as Thucydides recounts his arousing Athens' "eros" for the conquest of Sicily (Thucydides, 6.24.3). Whatever theatrical spectacle he creates, the Athenians are no mere spectators of his drama but actors, and in this case sufferers. The ravishing and Siren-like traits Alcibiades attributes to Socrates' speeches (215d–e) may more accurately describe his own, at least on the momentous occasion when he moved Athens to follow him to Sicily. Like the Sirens, Alcibiades promises the Athenians wonderful things, but lures them to their deaths (*Iliad* 12, 184–91).

Inasmuch as Alcibiades appears dressed like Dionysus, he seems to have come to judge the contest in wisdom that Agathon had proposed between himself and Socrates, "with Dionysus as judge" (175e). In fact, Alcibiades comes to crown Agathon for his victory in the tragic contests, but when he sees Socrates he takes some of the fillets he has just placed on Agathon's head to crown Socrates as well. For, Alcibiades pronounces, Socrates himself conquers everyone in speech, not only the other day like Agathon, but always (213e).[30] Alcibiades immediately thinks of speech in terms of conquest, and does not hesitate to play the judge. He sees to it that Socrates and Agathon share in the honors, as he sits in the middle of them on the couch (213b).

Alcibiades is not, however, altogether pleased to encounter Socrates at Agathon's. He greets Socrates by accusing him of "lying in ambush" for him, just as Socrates is "accustomed" to doing, and of appearing suddenly when Alcibiades least expects him (213b–c). Alcibiades' language here recalls his observation in the *Alcibiades I*, when Socrates first approached him, that Socrates always turns up wherever he happens to be (*Alcibiades I*, 100d). However, while Alcibiades sees Socrates' turning up on the night of the symposium in terms of the past, their relationship is not as it used to be, for Socrates is hardly seeking out Alcibiades as he had earlier. It is in fact Alcibiades, not Socrates, who now turns up "suddenly" when least expected (cf. 212c with 213c). Alcibiades is mistaken in seeing Socrates in "customary" terms. If there is any dialogue in which Plato does not do so it is this one, for Socrates is present at the party "having made himself beautiful," and "wearing fancy slippers contrary to his custom" (174a).

In the course of the banter between the two of them, Alcibiades claims that there will be no reconciliation between him and Socrates and that he will get his

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29. Geier points out that it is not until Alcibiades' arrival that the gathering becomes "a drinking party." Moreover, Alcibiades "introduces into the dialogue both the word for drinking partner, *sumpotēs* (212e4, 213b7, 216d7) and the word for drinking together, *sumpinein* (213a2), in *Plato's Erotic Thought: The Tree of the Unknown* (Rochester, NY: The University of Rochester Press, 2002), 53. By this means, Plato allows Alcibiades to give his dialogue its title.

30. Bacon, "Socrates Crowned," 424 and 427; Anton, "Some Dionysian References in the Platonic Dialogues," 50; Rosen, *Plato's Symposium*, 287; and Strauss, *On Plato's Symposium*, 26 and 257.

revenge on Socrates later (213d). His expression of a desire for revenge connects him with Euripides' Dionysus in yet another way. In the *Bacchae*, Dionysus comes to Thebes to exact revenge on those who refuse to recognize him as a god, especially Thebes' ruler Pentheus, whose slight to Dionysus results in his being dismembered limb from limb (*Bacchae*, 26–36; 43–48). Like Dionysus, Alcibiades does not bear slight easily, whether from Socrates—as his encomium reveals—or from his city when it charges him with impiety (Thucydides, 6.92.4). Of course if Alcibiades' revelations about Socrates constitute his revenge, his is more playful than Dionysus' revenge on Thebes, for Alcibiades only metaphorically tears Socrates apart by comparing him to the statues of Silenus and splitting him open (219e). And Socrates expresses the concern merely that Alcibiades may make him ridiculous (214e; cf. *Bacchai*, 250).

The ruin Alcibiades brought to his city, however, is another matter. Plato alludes to his disastrous effect on his city not only by dressing Alcibiades like Euripides' Dionysus, who devastated a city that did not properly honor him, but also by showing him in various ways acting like a tyrant at the gathering at Agathon's house. After crashing the party, he changes the terms of the agreed-upon entertainment and issues orders to the company (213e, 214c–d).[31] As Schein points out, when Alcibiades assumes the role of "leader of the symposium," literally, "leader of the drinking," *archōn poseōs*, he uses a phrase phonetically similar to "leader of the city," *archōn poleōs*. Plato thus "reminds us of the actual political behavior of Alcibiades, who, it was thought, was aiming at making himself tyrant"[32] (see also Thucydides, 6.53, 60–61). Although he at first admits it is "necessary to obey" when he joins the company at Agathon's house, he insists on not doing what they enjoin, but on praising Socrates (214b–d). He is his own man, even if he appears from his speech about Socrates to be still in love with him (222b).

Socrates claims to detect Alcibiades' underlying intention in his warning to Agathon not to be deceived by Socrates' attentions. Alcibiades' speech, Socrates insists, was only a screen to set Agathon and Socrates at odds, that Alcibiades might remain Socrates' only beloved, and Agathon's only lover (222c–d). That is, Alcibiades wants no competitor to come between either him and Socrates, or him and Agathon. When Alcibiades first sat next to Agathon, Agathon invited him to recline "in the third position." Placing himself between two already on the couch (Socrates and Agathon), Alcibiades is clearly the third. However, at Agathon's words, Alcibiades, who has not seen Socrates, asks "who is the third?" (213b). If there is a third, it cannot be he, Alcibiades assumes. He is not one who

31. Gary Alan Scott, *Plato's Socrates as Educator*, 123.
32. Seth L. Schein, "Alcibiades and the Politics of Misguided Love," 159.

joins others, but the one whom others join. As do many of Plato's characters, he says more than he knows.

When Socrates appeals to Agathon not to let Alcibiades part them, Agathon declares that he will move from one side of the couch to the other, in order to be next to Socrates (222e). Socrates has seized control from Alcibiades. Alcibiades may be defeated, but he should not be surprised; he proclaimed at the outset that Socrates always conquers by means of his speeches (213e). If Agathon moves, Socrates will lie in the middle between Alcibiades and Agathon, and perhaps metaphorically between Alcibiades' politics of empire and tragedy. We do not know, however, whether Socrates succeeded in moving Agathon to his side, for a crowd of revelers bursts in on the scene, for "someone went out" and left the door open (223b). Who left? If merely one of the anonymous guests, Plato would have no reason to include this detail. Might it be Alcibiades who left the door open as he departed?[33] From this point forward in the dialogue, he is not mentioned again. We are not told when, or with whom, or even if he leaves. He is forgotten. When Agathon moves over to Socrates' side, Alcibiades' moment is over. It is brief, as will be his command in Sicily. Alcibiades' sway is less than he would like it to be, for Agathon chooses not to follow his advice to avoid Socrates, and Socrates is clearly showing more interest in Agathon than in his former beloved.

More important, the drunken revel and chaos that the narrator now reports, as many scholars have noted, recalls the night that a group of Athenians (to which Alcibiades, as well as Phaedrus and Eryximachus were thought to have belonged) desecrated statues of Hermes. Since Phaedrus and Eryximachus are among the first to leave Agathon's party after the revelers enter, and Alcibiades disappears, had the symposium not occurred roughly a year before the infamous desecration, we might suppose that the mutilation of the Hermae took place the very night after the three implicated in the crime left Agathon's.[34] When Alcibiades refers to the Silenus figures with which he compared Socrates, he identifies them as those found in the shops of "herm sculptors" (215b).[35] Plato also has Alcibiades call Socrates "a god-send," in Greek a *hermaion* (217a), and then has him break Socrates apart by comparing him to a statue of Silenus. Regardless of when the desecration actually occurred, however, or even whether

33. This is also the suggestion of Geier, *Plato's Erotic Thought*, 57. The only other person, from among the named guests, who might have departed, is Pausanias.

34. Scholars suggest various connections between the symposium at Agathon's house and the crimes of which Alcibiades was accused; see Bloom, "The Ladder of Love," 72; Strauss, *On Plato's Symposium*, 1, 15, 24, 40, and 287; and Rosen, *Plato's Symposium*, 285.

35. The word Alcibiades uses for statuary's shops, *hermoglupheia*, is not a common one, but occurs only here in extant Greek literature. It means literally, the place of those who carve Hermes statues, and therefore of those who carve statues more generally.

Alcibiades actually participated in it, such allusions suggest Plato's judgment of Alcibiades' culpability for crimes against his city and for its ultimate ruin.[36]

Plato's Socrates

Alcibiades' view of Socrates follows the lead of Aristophanes, who portrays Socrates in the *Clouds* as unerotic and apolitical. Aristophanes' Socrates has little concern with either family or political life, as he suspends himself above his city to contemplate heavenly things (*Clouds*, 225; see also, e.g., 206–16). Plato's Socrates, in contrast, acknowledges his need of others (207c; *Apology*, 34d, 97e; *Phaedrus*, 230d), expresses his care for the young men who engage him in conversation (*Republic*, 451a), for his children (*Apology*, 41e), and for his fellow citizens (*Apology*, 29d–30a), and defends his city's authority over him (*Crito*, 50a ff.). Of course, one can attribute such claims to Socrates' famous irony (see *Republic*, 337a), but why should we take one claim of Socrates' as ironic but not another?[37] One might appeal to Socrates' deeds in order to judge his words. For example, Socrates does not merely claim he is unlike the sophists (*Apology*, 19d–20a), but in contrast to them he does not travel throughout the Greek world. He lived his entire life in Athens. Socrates did not merely acknowledge his obligations to his city, but he fought in its army (220e; *Charmides*, 153a; *Laches*, 189b; *Apology*, 28e). He does not merely present Diotima's teaching about love and the generation of offspring, he got married and had children. He not only told Alcibiades that he loved him (*Alcibiades I*, 103a), but he pursued him as a lover would (217a; see also *Protagoras*, 309a ff). And, as we have seen Alcibiades recount at the *Symposium*, Socrates saved his life in the battle at Potidaea (220e). However, even deeds might be ironic—as Nietzsche said of Socrates' marriage.[38] Only in light of how we understand Socrates' philosophical life do we judge the statements and deeds of Socrates. And if one understands the philosopher to be "a solitary, who can derive satisfaction from himself,"[39] one would be inclined to interpret such words and deeds of Socrates as part of his public presentation

36. Rumors of Alcibiades' involvement in the breaking of the Hermae, as well as of his revelation and desecration of the Eleusinian mysteries, aroused the public's fear of his tyrannical ambitions and ultimately led to the official charges against him (Thucydides, 6.27–28). Plato alludes to the latter charges against Alcibiades as well when he has Alcibiades present his revelations of Socrates' inner nature as if he were revealing secrets to the uninitiated (e.g., 218b).

37. Rosen maintains that Socrates' statement in the *Alcibiades I* that he pursues Alcibiades in order to assist him in fulfilling his desire to rule over all human beings (*Alcibiades. I*, 105c–e) is "not simply ironical," *Plato's Symposium*, 282. It is in light of an understanding of the character of philosophy that one understands Socrates' more arrogant claims to be not simply ironical, and his more modest ones as simply so. See, for example, *Plato's Symposium*, 215. See David Bolotin, "The Life of Philosophy and the Immortality of the Soul: An Introduction to Plato's *Phaedo*," *Ancient Philosophy* 7 (1987), 38–49.

38. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Essay 3, section 7.

39. Bloom, "The Ladder of Love," 167.

of himself to his fellow citizens, manifestations of a false outer cover. Facts do not speak for themselves; they require interpretation. As to Socrates' rescue of Alcibiades in battle, it might be interpreted not as an expression of his love, but as a sign of his self-sufficiency. Bloom argues that Socrates "acted *comme il faut*. He was nearby." Socrates thus defends Alcibiades, according to Bloom, "because the deed was forced on him; and he knows that many accidents occur in life, which if one tried to escape, one would live in constant, demeaning fear."[40] Bloom thus traces Socrates' deed to the same kind of self-sufficiency and independence that Alcibiades depicts in Socrates.

The lessons Socrates claims in the *Symposium* he learned from Diotima suggest otherwise, for they emphasize the needy rather than the self-sufficient character of philosophy. They are directed most immediately against the view that Love is beautiful and good. That view was articulated by the previous speaker Agathon. Socrates admits that when young he too held this opinion, but was taught otherwise by a foreign prophetess Diotima. As Socrates presents her lessons, we see that he learns not only about Love, but about philosophy, and about himself. In arguing that Love is neither beautiful nor good, but lies "in-between" beauty and ugliness, good and bad, Diotima demonstrates the existence of such middle states by reference to philosophy. Those who pursue wisdom, the philosophers, are not wise, although they know their own lack of wisdom (201e–04b). In other words, they have knowledge of ignorance, as Socrates describes his own human wisdom in the *Apology* (*Apology* 21c–23b). When Diotima traces Love's in-between state to his parents, Need (Penia) and Resource (Poros) (202b), she reminds us of Plato's Socrates, who often describes himself "at a loss" (*aporos*), or without resources or answers, but who nevertheless is well provided with the questions that keep his inquiry alive (see e.g., *Meno*, 80a ff.; *Republic*, 368b–c; 524a–b; *Theaetetus*, 190e–91a). As Love inherits from both Need and Resource, he is able to generate: when the (needy) lover falls in love, Diotima says, he is "resourceful" (*euporei*) in speaking to his beloved about virtue, and about what a good man should be and pursue (209b–c). In loving another, the lover finds resources within himself, and becomes able to generate speeches about what is good. He not only "loves and cares for [his beloved]," but also "seeks and gives birth to speeches that will make the young better" (210a–c).

Even when the lover proceeds to love the beauty in practices and laws, and in knowledge(s), and finally "to contemplate" beauty itself, "pure and unmixed," and "uninfected with human flesh and colors," he continues to generate, this time true rather than illusory virtue (210c–12a). The lover's ascent to the beautiful, which requires both need and resource, is thus inseparable from loving and

40. Bloom, "The Ladder of Love," 168.

teaching others, in whom the lover attempts to generate "true virtue," even at the highest stages of love.[41] This understanding of Love that Socrates claims to have learned from Diotima explains both his search for the beautiful and the good, and his care for others and desire to benefit them.[42] That may require his refuting others, and acting as a gadfly for his city, but it also explains his urging others to virtue (*Apology*, 29d). If Socrates were simply needy, he would have nothing to contribute. If he were simply resourceful, he would not seek those relationships that manifest and strengthen his connections to others. He would be as idle and as passive as the sleeping Resource in Diotima's story about Love's parents, who moves only by being loved (203b–c). Only those who partake of both need and resource belong to human community, and are in their manifold ways both in need of its help and able to contribute to its flourishing.

Socrates' rescue of Alcibiades from death made possible the latter's leading Athens to disaster in Sicily and his betrayal of his city to Sparta. Diotima as well contributes to Athens' defeat in the Peloponnesian War, at least according to the dramatic fiction of the *Symposium*. When introducing Diotima to the gathering, Socrates mentions that due to her prophetic art she postponed the plague in Athens for ten years (201d). As several commentators have noted, this postponement meant that the plague broke out right after the start of the Peloponnesian War, when all the country people were crowded into the city for protection from the ravaging Spartan army. The virulence of the plague was much greater than it would have been, had Diotima not interfered. Benardete observes that "Athens would have almost completely recovered from the plague by the start of the war," and the "outcome would certainly have been the victory of Athens."[43] Saxonhouse, who also notes this effect of Diotima's act, infers that her power "was not informed by an understanding of the cities of men; she did not foresee the political conflicts that Thucydides said were moving the Greek cities inexorably towards war." In her blindness to politics, Diotima is according to Saxonhouse like Socrates, "who praises her wisdom." Their lack of political concerns, she argues, is reflected in their turn to the beautiful, "untouched" by mortal elements.[44]

Yet why would Diotima postpone the plague? Can we be sure she had no inkling of what Thucydides thought was obvious? Diotima chooses a certain good for those living at the time at the risk of a political disaster in the future, which being in the future cannot be absolutely certain, perhaps not even for a seer such

41. See Mary P. Nichols, "Socrates' Contest with the Poets in Plato's *Symposium*," *Political Theory* 32 (2004): 186–206.

42. See Lawrence's excellent discussion of the place of the lover's love of a particular beautiful soul in Diotima's account of love in the *Symposium*, in "Socrates and Alcibiades," 320.

43. Benardete, "On Plato's *Symposium*," 192.

44. Saxonhouse, *The Fear of Diversity*, 178.

as Diotima. And if the plague can be delayed once, perhaps it can be delayed again. In her choice, she resembles Socrates, who saved from death a remarkable man whom he claimed to love, and whose dangerous ambitions were clear to him (*Alcibiades I*, 105a ff.), at the risk of an uncertain political disaster in the future. Both chose the good, when remaining idle would have been the safer course. Perhaps Socrates hoped that his rescue of Alcibiades would give the young man one more chance to understand Socrates' care as something more than a pretense. If so, Socrates tried to persuade Alcibiades by his deed of what even his "Marsyas-like" words could never do (see *Apology*, 32a). Diotima acts to save her contemporaries, and Socrates rescues Alcibiades—and not simply the good and noble qualities they may share with others. Whether or not their deeds contribute to Athens' ruin in the long run, they would manifest how much their love is "touched by mortal elements."

Whereas Alcibiades claims that Socrates wears his customary cloak even on a military campaign in the dead of winter (220b), Plato as we have seen portrays Socrates in the *Symposium* as a man who ignores his customary habits to dress for the occasion. He thus recognizes the conventions of time and place, if only of a dinner party, and adapts himself to them. So too he agrees to make his contribution to the entertainment the other guests propose (unlike Alcibiades), and listens to the speeches of the others before he gives his own, even when he believes that they are on the wrong track (198d ff.). Plato's Socrates (as opposed to the Socrates of Alcibiades' speech) engages only once in a trance-like state of contemplation such as the one that Alcibiades attributes to him—on the way to Agathon's party. His contemplation, however, delays his entrance only for a short time. Although Socrates arrives late to dinner, he is not so late that he misses it entirely (175a–b; 175e–76a).[45] No self-absorbed contemplation keeps him from a party with the intellectual and cultural elite of the day. And his own speech about Love responds to theirs, not only to Agathon's (199b ff.), but also to Aristophanes' (205e; also cf. 211d and 191b), to Eryximachus' (cf. 203a, 188c–d), to Pausanias' (cf. 209b–c, 184e), and to Phaedrus' (cf. 208d, 179b–80a).

If Alcibiades' vision of world empire is a political version of a cosmopolitan and transcendent philosophy, divorced from the limits of mortal, human life, it is not one that can be properly traced to Plato's Socrates. Alcibiades might have had one more chance to see Socrates from Plato's perspective, when after most of the

45. Rosen notes the difference between the lengthy contemplation Alcibiades attributes to Socrates and Socrates' briefer one just before the party, but draws the opposite conclusion. "The banquet and its participants," he writes, "make up a more pressing external circumstance for Socrates than the military campaign and his fellow soldiers," *Plato's Symposium*, 313. Like Alcibiades, Rosen presents Socrates as moved by compulsion rather than attraction. Socrates' admirer Aristodemus, who is present at the party, tells Agathon that such states of contemplation are "customary" for Socrates, but that Socrates "will come presently" (175b).

dinner guests leave or fall asleep Socrates spends the rest of the night in conversation (*dialegesthai*) (223c). But there is no sign of Alcibiades. Socrates stays up all night, but unlike in the all-night vigil Alcibiades describes, Socrates is not thinking alone. Rather he is discussing comedy and tragedy with the two poets present at the symposium who, because they are poets, are most likely to contribute to and benefit from such a conversation. After writing a series of speeches delivered to an indefinite number of guests (180c), Plato concludes his work by reminding us of how Socrates directs his arguments to his particular addressees.

Plato's works preserve through their dialogic form Socrates' vision of human complexity. They are the antitheses of the "ravishing" speeches that Alcibiades attributes to Socrates that produce their effect regardless of speaker and addressee (215b–c), and that therefore override the particular characters and concerns of their addressees. Perhaps it was Plato's conceit that his dialogues could have shown Alcibiades an image of Socrates' conversations and their pleasures that Alcibiades could have made his own, and thus saved Athens from Alcibiades in a way that Socrates did not.[46] Plato's dialogues, of course, were not available to Alcibiades. The historical Alcibiades arrived too early to read Plato. So too Plato contrives that he arrives too late at the symposium to hear Socrates identify the intermediate character of love and of philosophy, and thus indicate essential limits to human aspiration without denying the possibility of human achievement. By writing dialogues, Plato made it possible for readers to arrive on time. Perhaps Socrates' concluding conversation is directed toward a comic poet as well as tragic one because while he is aware of the tragic dimensions of a politics of empire in its drive for universality, he also offers reason for hope. Politics is not necessarily tragic if it can reflect a philosophy characterized by reciprocity, recognizing both one's own needs as well as resources, and others' resources as well as needs.

46. For a different speculation, see Benardete, "On Plato's *Symposium*," 198–99.