

# The Symposium



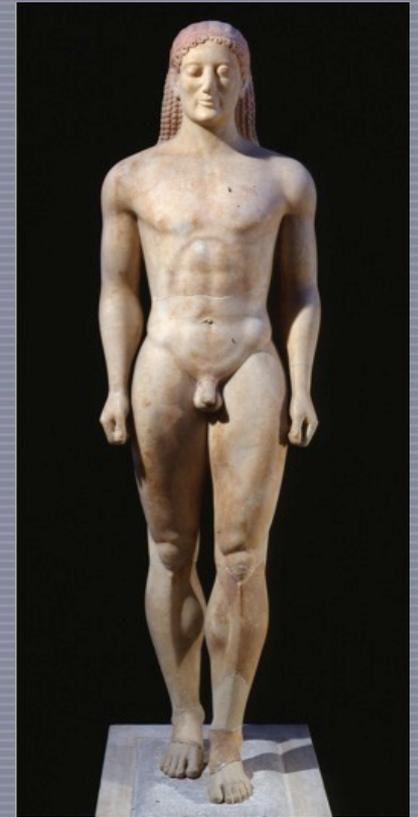
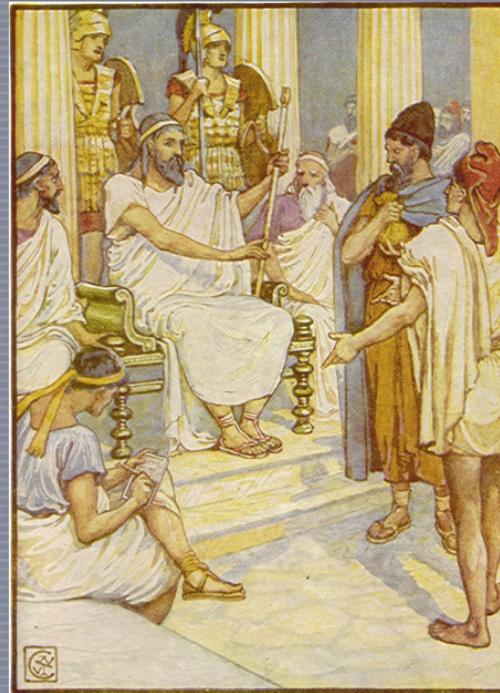
# From laws to pots to parties



**Solon's laws:** a model of justice, balance between rich and poor.

**Decorated pots:** a care for the beauty of objects around them

**The standing Kouroi:** the beauty of the human body. Even the gods share our form.



# The Symposium—a dialogue



## Background:

- ❑ Plato (428-348 BCE)
- ❑ Student of Socrates (died 399 BCE)
- ❑ Culture of Athens in the 5<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century BCE
  - | Skipping ahead to the following era
  - | Age of Pericles
  - | Persian War to Peloponnesian War
  - | Upper class life



# Life for the Wealthy in Athens



- ❑ Private education for young men
- ❑ Democracy in action
- ❑ Marriage arrangements
- ❑ Homosexuality as model of friendship/mentorship—  
set duration

Erastes

÷ Older, active



Eromenos

the boy, passive

# Three Forms of Love



- ❑ **Agape**-- love of a spouse or family, or affection for a particular activity [note Christian use]
- ❑ **Eros**—sexual love
- ❑ **Philia**--an affection that could denote either brotherhood or generally non-sexual affection



# The Symposium as a literary form



- ❑ As drama— a lived account
- ❑ As rhetoric— individuals compete with their speeches
- ❑ As dialectic—the Socratic method of working through a problem.
- ❑ **PROBLEM:** What is love and how it is central to the human experience?



# Symposium as story



- The Chinese box character of this dialogue:
- **Apollodorus** tells person X about a previous exchange with **Glaucon** that occurred several days past when he had shared the story from **Aristodemus** who attended the party 10 years ago (but had fallen asleep during it anyway!)
- Everyone get that?

# Imagery



- The Path of story telling
- on the road--Journeys, places
- gatherings



# Some Greek Vocabulary concepts



- ❑ Skolia—poems at symposiums that zigzag around
- ❑ Enkomia—formal eulogies of praise
- ❑ Eros/eros—love, erotic love (God/concept)
- ❑ Erastes—older pursuing lover
- ❑ Eromenos—younger, receiving beloved
- ❑ Paideia—pedagogy, education → literary and cultural accomplishments
- ❑ Symptic literature—words around and about the table

# Decoding the Stories I



## Characters and order of their speeches:

- ❑ Phaedrus (1) and Eryximachus (3)
- ❑ Agathon (5) and Pausanias (2)
- ❑ Aristophanes (4)
- ❑ Socrates (6)
- ❑ Alcibiades (7)
- ❑ Each speech has two levels: the surface story in mythic narrative and the internal meaning

# Decoding the stories II



- As each character offers his speech in honor of love, we explore the essential nature of love and relationships, an account of what matters—through the lens of concrete individuals, each of whom defines love from the perspective of his own interests.
- How might you see “beauty” factoring into the discussion topic?

# The story begins...



- ❑ Describe the opening scene:
- ❑ Who is throwing the party and why?
- ❑ What is Socrates doing?
- ❑ When the guests all arrive what do they decide to do (or not do!) and why?

# Phaedrus



- ❑ Love is the oldest of Gods
- ❑ The power of love to bond people together in insurmountable ways
- ❑ We become good, better people, because we want to be worthy of those we love
- ❑ His examples of lovers include?



# Phaedrus' pairs



- ❑ Love is the oldest of gods and inspires us to be better people so as to live up to the expectations of our lover.
- ❑ Alcestis and Admetus
- ❑ Orpheus and Eurydice
- ❑ Achilles and Patroclus
- ❑ Love and virtue go together.

**Would you rather love or be loved?**

# Pausanias' Speech



- ❑ Two kinds of love: heavenly and earthly
- ❑ The better kind of love- heavenly love, dedicated to the improvement of the beloved.
- ❑ Outlining the proper lover-beloved relationship: scripting relationships

**Do we have scripts for “proper love?”**



# Interlude



- Aristophanes has the hiccups– why?
- Eryximachus offers medical advice and offers to go before him.

# Eryximachus' speech



- The doctor Eryximachus offers his view on love
- The scientific view of love:
  - ┆ Love as the organizing principle of life: balance and repletion
  - ┆ Love in medicine, music, seasons, religion
  - ┆ Note how “love” is moving beyond the interpersonal experience towards a more abstracted notion
  - ┆ Love is in every aspect of human affairs, governing and balancing

**How do scientists describe love?**

# Aristophanes' speech



Before we can understand love, we have to understand humans

Three kinds of humans:

male-male, sons of Helios

female-female, daughters of Mother  
Earth

male-female (androgynous), children of  
the moon

# The Origins of Love

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[https://youtu.be/\\_zU3U7E1Odc](https://youtu.be/_zU3U7E1Odc)

# Aristophanes speech- Zeus' decision



What does Zeus decide to do to humankind and why?

The result: distraught and unhappy, incomplete beings

The solution?

The consequence: longing for and looking for our  
“missing half”

# Aristophanes' conclusion



- Aristophanes concludes that Love represents the completion of a whole. We are only partial beings without our special partner.

**Do you believe in soul mates?**



# Agathon's Speech



- ❑ Agathon is the celebrated poet; the party is in his house and in his honor.
- ❑ Love is the youngest of the gods
- ❑ --the most beautiful in looks and demeanor
- ❑ --delicate, supple, flowery
- ❑ --character of moral excellence: just, temperate, brave and wise
- ❑ --love makes us poets
- ❑ Read his culminating summary, 197 d-e

# A Kouros

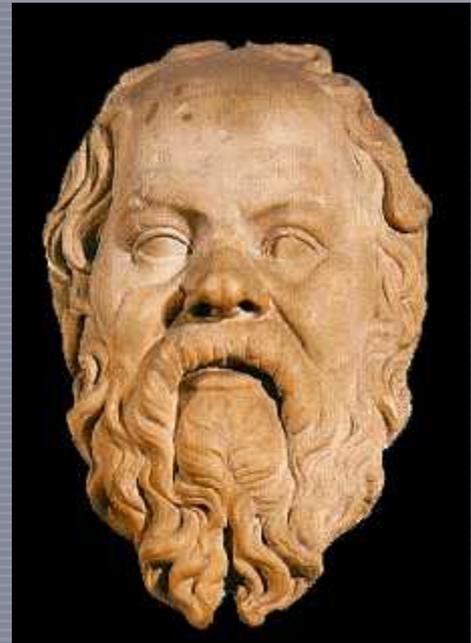
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# Socrates- interlude



- ❑ Socrates expresses dismay that the speeches are not about truth but simply glossy showcases
- ❑ He questions Agathon about his description of love on a number of points.



# What is wrong with Agathon's claims?



- ❑ Love is love of something not obtained, a yearning
- ❑ Love seeks the beautiful and the good, therefore must not already have those!
- ❑ Agathon is deflated. Does that mean love must be ugly and lacking in goodness if it desires it?

# Socrates account of Love



- Socrates as a student of Diotima:
- Between wisdom and ignorance, lies --?
- Between beauty and ugliness lies --?

Love as a spirit, neither god nor human. Daimons bind the universe together...

# Part I--The story of Love



Love is the child of Wherewithal (handsome young man) and Want (needy young woman)

By nature neither mortal nor god

Love is between wanting and having

Those who seek wisdom are like Love, between knowing and ignorance... the **Philosopher**

# Part II-What does Love do for us?



- ❑ The universal desire among humans
- ❑ Our limited concept of “love” is analogous to our concept of ‘art’ We think that “art” means pictures whereas it can really include any creative work just as we think “love” refers only to how we feel about a person
- ❑ How does Diotima expand “love” beyond the sexual? ---Love of business, money, sports, etc.
- ❑ “Love is the desire for permanent possession of the good..” (206b)

## Part III- What is love's aim and what does it accomplish?



Love and beauty, desire to create, to be god-like

Love is our yearning for immortality, preservation

- bodily/animal urges to pro-create
- yearning to learn, to “replenish” what has disappeared

# Evidence for love as yearning for preservation



1. Parents caring for their young; their ambitions for their children
2. Pursuit of honor, glory, fame– the hero

Potency in physical creation, fame, art, wisdom...



# Ascent of Love



- ❑ Beautiful body- the lover
- ❑ Beautiful soul, person
- ❑ Giving birth to virtuous ideas
- ❑ Appreciation for human beauty
- ❑ Beauty of laws, cultures, customs
- ❑ Beauty of the branches of knowledge
- ❑ Beauty of knowledge itself

# Ascent upward leads to...



- The Form of beauty itself: eternal, infinite, whole, independent

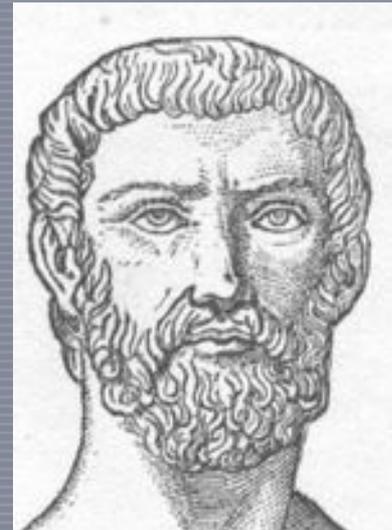
The metaphor of a ladder: 211b-212a

What might this search for beauty/love possibly be?

# Alcibiades enters



- The flirtation with Agathon... and Socrates
- His speech in praise of Socrates
  - ┆ How does he upend the tradition of lover/beloved?
  - ┆ What attracts Alcibiades about Socrates?
  - ┆ What stories of Socrates does Alcibiades share?
  - ┆ What image of Socrates do we receive?



# The End



- What do we learn about Socrates at the very end of the dialogue?
- **How does love, beauty, wisdom convene into a sense of universal human search for Truth?**
- **How does Philosophy ultimately represent our search for understanding, beauty and consolation in our lives?**
- **What does this dialogue reveal about the nature of the Athenians?**