

Plato's Symposium: The love of wisdom is the highest form of love/philosophy. What path will bring us into a closer apprehension of Beauty while souls are still in bodies ?

Theme:

We can progress from bodily beauty to beauty of mind, to beauty of institutions and laws and the sciences alone (210-11)-finally, to essential beauty entire, pure, and unallowed (211e).

“We learn to love beauty, so to speak, in diluted form to start with-the physical beauty of man or woman-but having acquired the taste, or developed the perceptual skill to discern it clearly, we can go to higher and better beauties-with the promise, or at least the hope, that we may gain again behold Beauty in itself (discourse of Diotima of Mantinea)”

Doctrine of recollection (anamnesis): In the shock of birth, our souls, which beheld the Form directly, repress this memory. But it can be recalled, and when recalled it constitutes true knowledge” (*Phaedrus* 249e). The question is: what is the role of an artist in this process of recollection?

There are 2 complimentary ways:
 (1) Knowledge by description (ideal forms exists in abstract, non-physical knowledge);
 (2) Knowledge by acquaintance (while souls are still in bodies, it is done by love (Eros) (see *Phaedrus*, 249e-250d).

Interesting Obs:

1. Diotama & Socrates do not assign a role to the arts in the process of reawakening to Beauty.

2. If we can be better with the Form by recourse to arts, then to that extent they give us or help us attain knowledge unto the Form, they are helpful.

3. Is there a distinction between appearing beautiful and being beautiful? An artist who distorts shapes to make then “appear to be beautiful” might deserve better treatment from Plato rather than mimesis because he is working to embody the Form of beauty (see *Sophist* 236a).

“Now if a man believes in the existence of beautiful things, but not of Beauty itself, and cannot follow a guide would lead him to a knowledge of it, is he not living in a dream? (*Republic*, 476c).

Outline:

First Sequence: 1-5
 The Effects of Eros:

- I. Prologue: 172a-178a
- II. The Speech of Phaedrus (178a-180b)
- III. The Speech of Pausanias (180c-185d)
- A. Interlude: Aristophanes hiccup (185d-e)
- IV. The Speech of Eryximachus (186a-189b)
- The Speech of Aristophanes (189c-193d)
- A. Interlude (193e-194c).

**Second Sequence: 6-7:
 The Nature of Eros:**

- I. Speech of Agathon (195a-197e).
- A. Interlude: Socrates and Agathon (198a-201c).
- II. The Speech of Socrates (201d-212c).
- A. The Nature of Eros (201-204e).
- III. The Speech of Alcibiades: eulogy to Socrates (212d-222e).
- IV. Epilogue (222e-223d).

Theory of Forms (ideas): The absolute essence lies behind material realm. Human sense perception can perceive only distorted “material” shadows of the real (the forms). But Through philosophy we may attain a closer apprehension of the Form (*Symposium* 210b).

The ladder of Love: 210: (1) Love of single beautiful body which leads to (2) see how beauty exists in all beautiful bodies. (3) Perceive the beautiful soul as a purer instance of beauty and a more worthy quest of the lover (210b); (4) sphere of erotic knowledge whereby one contemplates the beauty present in knowledge (5) which lead to a single kind of knowledge: love of wisdom. Beautiful *qua* form. Beauty is the good in the cave.

Phaedrus:

Eros is the best guide to virtue for the lover inspired by Eros will be inspired to display courage leading to self-sacrifice.

Pausanias:

Distinction between 2 kinds of Aphrodite type love: heavenly love & common love. The former love promotes moral development.

Eryximachus:

Argues that there is a noble & bad love are polar opposites. Good love causes things to come together in harmony. Strife causes things to come apart.

Aristophanes:

Accounts for human condition: the nature of love is longing for the other half from which we have been separated.

Agathon:

The nature of love is most beautiful and the most virtuous of the gods. It is most beautiful because it is most delicate and young and is most virtuous because it involves Love’s goodness (just, temperate, brave, and skillful). It is the cause of all similar excellences in others.

Plato:

Agathon failed to see that love, by its very nature, is always a love of something (love desires that which it loves). It follows that love necessarily lacks that which it desires (199d-200b). Eros is an offspring of Resource & Poverty; in love with what is beautiful, a lover of wisdom. Love is wanting to possess the good forever (206A). The real object of love is not just the good, but giving birth in beauty, which is at the heart, a desire for immortality.

Alcibiades:

He is the quintessential person of physical beauty but lacks self-discipline, representing physical side of passion. He is rejected by Socrates (who is pregnant); Socrates gets the poor side of bargain if consents to an exchange of physical love for wisdom.