

Transcript 5.1

LEO STRAUSS, NOTES ON PLATO'S SYMPOSIUM (C. 1959)

Editorial note: This is the transcript of an untitled typescript found in Leo Strauss Papers, box 18, folder 17, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library. Based on the content one can surmise that these notes were written sometime in 1959, the period when Strauss was teaching his famous course on Plato's *Symposium*, edited by Seth Benardete and published as Leo Strauss, *On Plato's Symposium* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). These notes can be therefore considered a companion piece of that course transcript. Numbers in the curly brackets refer to the page numbers of the typescript. Additions are all indicated by square brackets. The underlinings in the transcript have been replaced with italics.

{1} The proper state of mind in which to approach a Platonic work: not that of a babe in the woods, yet a certain innocence, some sort of virginity. *Monos pros monon* [one alone to one alone]:¹ a judicious disregard of "the results of Platonic research": what we can *know* is ultimately the Corpus Platonicum as it has come down to us from antiquity. That this or that is an *early* dialogue or above all that this or that is a *spurious* dialogue is less certain than that the dialogue in question was regarded as a work of Plato by men who knew Greek better than any classical scholar, to say nothing at present of Plato's school.

3 points to remember when studying any Platonic work: 1) Plato didn't write treatises—"step by step as well as correctly"² - but beautiful dialogues, beautiful fictions, beautiful lies. What is the general character of

these beautiful lies? What is *the* beautiful lie? → 2 and 3 2) Logographic necessity—nothing superfluous—everything is meaningful—in the dialogues (≠ the world) there is no *tyche* [chance]—e.g. that Socrates is snub-nosed: so that Aristotle can illustrate by Socrates's snub-nosedness that the ideas are "in matter."³ 3) No dialogue about the whole—each dialogue deals with a part - the utmost a dialogue can teach is the truth about a part—a partial truth—a half-truth. Every dialogue abstracts from something. If the result of a given dialogue is paradoxical or shocking we ought not to be shocked by it: the paradox will be corrected in other dialogues. For: that is ὀρθή δόξα [orthē doxa = correct opinion]

I) *Symposium*: eros—the god eros—the only Platonic dialogue to be devoted to a god → *Symposium* the Platonic theology (*Laws* X and *Republic* II belong to a non-theological context). The god chosen for discussion in the Platonic dialogue on a god is a little god, {2} a god not worshipped by the city - yet the most plausible god (everyone has *experienced* him). Now, of the only god ever made the theme of a dialogue, Socrates says that he is not a god at all but only a demon; and it appears that he is not even a demon, a superhuman willing and thinking being, but = *epithumia* [desire, concupiscence] something which is only *in* mortal animals - which is not self-subsisting.

II) The *theme* of the *Symposium* is most singular - so is the *title* - the only title of a dialogue which indicates the *occasion*. The only occasion of a dialogue indicated by a title is a *symposion*—*parresia* [speaking candidly]—*hybris* → Socrates's *hybris*.

Titles: 25 - 7 - 3—*Erastai* the participants → *Symposium* and *Epinomis*. *Symposium*: the Olympian gods are not but there are cosmic gods - *Symposium* abstracts from the cosmic gods [Strauss's note: *Ap. Soc.* 26c-d: S. does not refute the charge that he does not believe in the Olympian gods but refutes the charge that he does not believe in the cosmic gods]: it is atheistic. "Socrates" occurs only in "Apology of Socrates," the *accusation*—not the gods which the city worships = not the Olympian gods. *Symposium* teaches that Socrates is guilty of that charge - this is Socrates's *hybris*.

III) *Symposium* a *narrated* dialogue: 9 of them - 3 narrated by people other than Socrates: Parmenides, Phaedo, *Symposium*. Parmenides and Phaedo present the *young* Socrates: the *physiologos* who turns to teleology—the whole is altogether good, or beautiful → there are no *ideas* of ugly or base things.

Socrates's speech in the *Symposium* = report of Diotima's speech—addressed to the *young* Socrates → culminates in the vision of the beautiful

itself. More than that: central of the 7 speeches in the Symposium is that by Aristophanes—who had attacked the young Socrates in the Clouds for saying among other things “Zeus is not.”

IV) Symposium *doubly* narrated *and* narrated for the *second time*—this is unique—someone had heard that there were erotic speeches {3} at a dinner at which Agathon, Socrates and Alcibiades had participated and that dinner had taken place a short while ago. The reply: Agathon has left Athens years ago—Agathon’s absence from Athens *proves* that the exchange of speeches *cannot* have taken place a short while ago; the other fellow did not know that Agathon had left Athens. The reply does not refer to Socrates: Socrates is always in Athens. But what about Alcibiades? Was not Alcibiades *absent* since 415? The argument doesn’t make sense if Alcibiades is not in Athens at the time when the conversations are narrated—and: whether or not *Alcibiades* (≠ Agathon) is in Athens, is of course a matter of public and universal knowledge → 407. The dinner itself: 416. Alcibiades had left or deserted Athens in 415: the mutilation of the Hermae and the profanation of the Eleusinian mysteries. Phaedrus and Eryximachus involved in that scandal → 3 out of the 7 speakers of the Symposium known to be involved in that scandal. And: in the Symposium a divulcation of the mysteries takes place (Aristophanes and especially Socrates) → Symposium tells the true story of what happened in 416. That story can be told now, in 407, after the reconciliation of Athens and Alcibiades and after the Eleusinian procession could take place again thanks to Alcibiades. Story told originally by Aristodemus who was present: he is the leak from those present to the younger comrades of Socrates, and the emotional Apollodorus is the leak from the Socratics to the outside world. Bottleneck: shows that even now the matter is not entirely public. But the story itself: nothing scandalous - everything was decent, no Black Mass - above all Alcibiades came in when everything was over - and no *Athenian* mysteries but *Mantinean* mysteries. Yet: *Socrates* was the culprit → Socrates’s hybris → *Plato’s* hybris.

{4} V) The original accusation of Socrates’s hybris had been made by a poet, Aristophanes’ Clouds - generally, the poets accuse the philosophers of hybris (cf. *Laws* X, *Republic* X) → The Symposium meets this accusation. A tragic poet had won in a tragic contest; Symposium the contest of the victorious tragic poet and Socrates with Dionysus as judge → *Frogs*: contest between 2 tragic poets decided with a view as to how they stand to Alcibiades. Plato’s contest with Aristophanes’ *Frogs*: *after* the contest between 2 tragic poets, a contest between *all* forms of Athenian wisdom,

fl1 rhetoric, medicine, comedy, tragedy, philosophy, in which Alcibiades as
2 Dionysus is the judge. He crowns *Socrates*.

3 VI) 6 speeches in praise of eros and one speech in praise of Socra-
4 tes. Uninspired eros subject to something extraneous to it—gain, virtue
5 (= *nomos* [law, convention]), *techne* [art]; inspired: eros sovereign—ugli-
6 ness, beauty, the good (inspired by Diotima). Alcibiades's speech inspired
7 by wine.

8 The central speech: Aristophanes—the only one to deal with the most
9 comprehensive theme, the Olympian gods and the cosmic gods. Man
10 originally descended from the cosmic gods (sun, moon and earth) - their
11 shape (round) and somehow their motion (turning around their axis) -
12 had nothing in common with the Olympian gods except their sexuality.
13 This man shares also with brutes but no mating seasons → specific of man
14 and Olympian gods: sexiness. But man was not meant to live in Olympian
15 bliss: no physis [nature] limitation of his sex life but *nomos* [law, conven-
16 tion] limitations, i.e. prohibition against incest. This *nomos* imposed on
17 him by the Olympian gods who are not subject to that *nomos* and who
18 impose it on man not out of love for man but for *their* own profit: domes-
19 tication of man. {5} Still, through *nomos* man becomes human → the cause
20 which makes man human must itself be of human shape: the Olympian
21 gods. Original man is split into 2 and thus acquires erect stature - but not
22 for looking up to the cosmic gods: from the Olympian gods' point of view
23 in order to honor and feed them; from men's point of view for the sake
24 of amorous embrace: men received an erect stature so that they could
25 *lie* together. Eros is distinctly human: eros is a desire for remedying the
26 scission effected by Zeus - the countermove to Zeus's move - rebellion
27 against the *nomos*. (Biblical: the only action in the performance of which
28 one cannot think of God is the sexual act.)⁴

29 Eros is seeking the other half - but owing to Apollo's blunder the other
30 half remains skinless and perished → *eros can never reach its goal*: it is
31 essentially tragic. Eros is seeking the other half - one's own flesh and
32 blood → eros is essentially *incestuous*; but also: eros is essentially love for
33 one's own - one's own is necessarily distinguished from the alien → eros
34 for the *fatherland*. [Footnote. Since *the* goal of eros is unattainable, *political*
35 life is the best → Alcibiades: both Alcibiades and Aristophanes are bodily
36 handicapped (concerned with the body). Alcibiades agrees with Aristo-
37 phanes that Socrates is completely unerotic.]

38 *Agathon*: eros of the *beautiful* (≠ one's own)
39

These 2 conceptions of eros are the most important premises of Socrates's speech on eros. That speech: 7 parts (just as Symposium as a whole - 7 speeches) I) how to praise eros = the true rhetoric (corresponds to Phaedrus' speech → Phaedrus) - silence on the base in eros → Socrates abstracts from that. II) Dialogue between Socrates and Agathon. III-VII) = Socrates's speech: eros is neither love of one's own (Aristophanes) nor of the beautiful (Agathon) but of the good. The exposition of this truth is accompanied by silence {6} about gods, no immortality proper, no pederasty. But in the 3 last parts of Socrates's Diotima speech—a) love in procreation = love of *one's own* b) love of eternal glory (especially the poets) = love of *one's own* c) love of the *beautiful* culminating in the vision of the beautiful itself: restoration of these forms of eros (even of pederasty)—but *no* restoration of gods and immortality proper. [Strauss's note: ἔρως [eros] = maternal instinct—no natural inclination toward moral virtue—cf. ἔρως [eros] of φρόνησις [phronesis=prudence] (Phaedrus) ≠ ἔρως of virtue: Xenophon *On Hunting*—cf. Thomas Aquinas.] Massive contradiction: denial that eros is of the beautiful—and the speech culminates in praise of eros of the beautiful. Why that? Eros is of one's own on the one hand and of the beautiful on the other—in both respects it creates the gods, the Olympian gods: 1) beautiful → beautiful beings—of eternal beauty and youth; 2) one's own → ancestors, fatherland, polis [city], dike [justice]—*avenging* gods mediated by thymos [spiritedness] (not mentioned in Symposium). By recognizing the *grounds* of the Olympian gods in eros, by understanding them as *postulates* of eros one becomes free of them—eros thus becomes fully: *natural* eros—The Symposium presents the catharsis of eros. There is another kind of eros → the good = the true → the cosmic gods—this eros is not in the ordinary sense of the word most beautiful, therefore abstracted from in the *praise* of eros.

VII) The context—contest with poets—the poets do *not* purify eros—they abandon themselves to the demands of eros—either of one's own (comic poet) or of the beautiful (tragic poet) but: they believe in the Olympian gods as little as Socrates. What then is the ground of *Socrates's* superiority to the poets both present and absent? Socrates: philosophic presentation of poetry and poetic presentation of philosophy: the poets *might* give a poetic presentation of philosophy but no philosophic presentation of poetry. Socrates can give a disenchanting presentation of poetry and an enchanting {7} presentation of philosophy. The poets are only enchanters: Socrates is also a disenchanter. The poets are *only* inspired

by their madness: Socrates is also sober. We could leave it at that if there were only 1 kind of poetry, but there are 2 kinds, tragedy and comedy; tragedy is enchanting but comedy is disenchanting. *Hen monon sophon* [the one wise thing] wishes and does not wish to be called Zeus⁵—wishes → tragedy, enchanting; does not wish → comedy, disenchanting. The former is higher: Agathon is awake when Aristophanes has already dozed off—but not simply: the *technē* tragedian [tragedian by art] is also a comedian—the statements cannot be inverted. The poet who is both a tragic poet and a comic poet is *Socrates*—but is this true?

The explicit discussion of the poets: they generate the beautiful - works of immortal beauty - but not out of love of the beautiful but for the sake of their eternal fame: love of one's own ≠ Socrates inspired by love of the beautiful and free from love of his own does not produce works of immortal beauty: he does not *write* → Socrates wins the contest with the poets because his love is *pure*.

But *Plato* wrote. Is it possible that Plato who had realized the true standard should have had the baseness so harmlessly to fall short of it? → Socrates *could* not write—he could not *invent*, he was a midwife, barren—but: the 3 *kymata* [waves] in the *Republic*. Socrates was rhetor - he could make speeches - and therefore he could have written them down. Socrates's rhetoric and its *limitations*: *Gorgias*—*exhibitio ad Gorgiam*: his success with Polus, his failure with Calicles - he could not write punitive speeches - *therefore* he did not write. He could have written comedies but the highest is {8} not comedy but tragedy concealing comedy. *The* punitive man, the angry man, *Thrasymachus* → *Farabi*.⁶ Young Socrates ≠ old Socrates = he discovered the *necessity* of the αἰσχρὸν [*aischrón* = shameful, base] and ἄλογον [*álogon* = irrational]—the recalcitrance of the political—. The limitation of Socrates: *Plato* in *Syracuse*, *Xenophon* with *Cyrus* and almost founder of a city - Socrates was not political enough to write - the contest with the poets simply (≠ the poets present at the Banquet) is won only through *Plato*.

VIII) *Alcibiades's* speech 1) Socrates a *Marsyas* - superior to *Marsyas*—flutes—the religious and tragic effect of “statues of *gods*.” Socrates's speeches [*Strauss's* note: but no reference to *gods*] 2) Socrates as *Silenus* - his *deeds*: outwardly he is erotic and ignorant - inwardly he is full of contempt for all men, even for *Alcibiades*, and he is full of knowledge - but *Alcibiades* did not discover that inward or secret knowledge although he slept with Socrates - he is not even aware of his having missed it - he

only discovered Socrates's sophrosyne [moderation] = hybris. Socrates guilty of hybris but not guilty of corrupting the young - guilty of hybris: the gods worshipped by the city - but this hybris is identical with his sophrosyne: the fact that his eros has been purified or he does not assert what he does not know: cautious-bold. [Strauss's note: ὕβρις—σωφροσύνη [hybris - moderation] → μανία [mania = madness] of σωφρ.—this primary opposition (thought ≠ speech)—this ultimate identity (the μανία of the pre-Socratics)] 3) the Silenus-like character of Socrates's *speeches*: externally ridiculous, internally "statues of *virtue*" - = *comedies*.

Socrates had presented his eros in his speech as love of the beautiful (≠ one's own) - yet silence on eros in the highest stages there → eros *proper* is for living human beings, the young and beautiful ones with whom one can be present in body Antigone v. 1— the eros for the young which is effective through *writings* is alien to him.

Socrates as presented by Alcibiades: Socrates does not love at all—he despises all men—yet he *cares* for men—? because he loves to *be* loved - his eros is only self-love, love of his own - but: love of what is most his own (his soul) and therefore for his soul being best.

{9} Phaedrus ≠ Pausanias the omitted speeches—how to figure them out? → love of gain.

Eryximachus

Aristophanes ≠ Agathon → love of one's own, of something which is outside the lover

Socrates - Alcibiades → Socrates lover of gain → one should distrust the lover: beginning of *Phaedrus*: the Symposium the beginning of the love affair with Phaedrus (also Isocrates only 20 at date of Symposium).⁷

IX) Alcibiades's speech the satyr play → a *tragedy* preceded it a) the tragedy = Alcibiades's betrayal of philosophy, desertion of philosophy which Socrates was helpless to prevent. b) the *Symposium* a tragedy—*Socrates's speech* a tragedy - ?how this possible? punishment presupposes: *dike* [justice] or *law* - tragedy a *nomos* [law, convention] (*Laws* 817b) - a unity which is as ennobling as it is spurious. This tragedy = *nomos* is the poetic presentation of philosophy which culminates in the *nomos* regarding eros (end of Socrates's speech) (cf. Pausanias's deliberative speech): the purport of the *nomos*: eros proper → human beings, especially males. The reasoning *leading up* to that *nomos* is Diotima's = young Socrates - the *conclusion* (= *nomos*) is all Socrates's - but: the cautious formulation ("not easily a better helper") - the cautious formulation does not justify the

nomos: Socrates is not a legislator. Alcibiades says in effect: Socrates does not honor eros - he transgresses the law which he himself laid down. The alternative to eros as a helper toward philosophy: dike [justice] (*Republic*).

Notes

1. An allusion to Plotinus's statement: the "flight of the alone to the alone." See Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.9.11, 1.6.7, 6.7.34. For Strauss's meaning here, see Leo Strauss, *Xenophon's Socratic Discourse: An Interpretation of the Oeconomicus* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), xiii.

2. See Plato, *Symposium* 210e2.

3. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1037a20-b7.

4. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1152b15-20.

5. Attributed to Heraclitus (Diels-Kranz 22 B 32).

6. See Leo Strauss, "Fârâbî's Plato," in *Louis Ginzberg: Jubilee Volume on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1945), 383, or in *Leo Strauss's Published but Uncollected English Writings: 1937-1972*, edited by Steven J. Lenzner and Svetozar Y. Minkov (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine Press), 97-98.

7. See Plato, *Phaedrus* 278e.

Transcript 5.2

LEO STRAUSS, NOTES ON AGATHON'S SPEECH IN PLATO'S *SYMPOSIUM* (C. 1959)

Editorial Note: The following is a transcription of Strauss's notes on Agathon's speech in the *Symposium* that he used in his course on the dialogue in the fall quarter of 1959 at the University of Chicago. The notes are found in Leo Strauss Papers, box 17, folder 6, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library. Like the transcripts 5.1 and 5.3 in this volume, these notes are published here as a supplement to Strauss's class sessions on Agathon as found in Leo Strauss, *On Plato's Symposium*, edited by Seth Benardete (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 155–73. The notes here have the benefit of containing detailed references to the text (with the marginal Stephanus numbers), cross-references, underlinings, and other ways of indicating emphasis, the punctuation, and the general flow of how Strauss connected lines of thoughts and consequences, words in the original Greek, additional observations, and so forth. Numbers in the angle brackets refer to the page numbers of the manuscript. Additions are all indicated by curly brackets. The underlinings in the notes have been replaced with italics.

<28> **Agathon's Speech** (194e4–197e8)

194e4 Agathon is the only one who begins with Εγώ {I}: he is beautiful & successful and he *knows* that he is beautiful and successful.

<29> 194e4–5 To speak of how one ought to speak is not truly to speak [unless ῥητορικὴ {art of rhetoric} is based on ψυχολογία {psychology}]

194e5-6 Aristophanes had blamed all earlier *human beings*—Agathon only blames all *earlier speakers tonight* → Agathon is not a revolutionary, an iconoclast, for iconoclasm is αἰσχροὺν τι {something/somewhat shameful}.

194e6-195a5 For the first time, the *god himself* becomes the theme—not as something merely existing *in* the souls of men etc. but as *self-subsisting*—of *what quality* he is. Aristophanes had almost touched upon this (189d3-5): δύναμις {power} of ἔρωσ {eros} ≠ the human nature, not the nature of ἔρωσ → will Agathon discuss the nature of ἔρωσ?

195a1-3: the *philosophic* character of his speech: the universal statement on every praise regarding every possible thing → the gifts of ἔρωσ = that of which ἔρωσ is the cause.

195a5-7 the *plan* of his speech

I ἔρωσ οἷος {qualities of} I) κάλλιστος {most beautiful} 195a7-196b5 2) ἄριστος {best} (196b5-197b)

II ἔρωσ as αἰτία {cause} (197a-e)

the whole speech of Agathon is characterized by unusually clear order—for τάξις {order} is an element of κάλλος {beauty}.

But: he does not raise the *primary* question—of the τί ἐστὶ {what is} of ἔρωσ—i.e. quid sit deus {what is a god?}.

His praise of ἔρωσ is necessarily a *critique of the other gods*: they all are less than perfect regarding beauty and goodness.

195a7-b5 The first subdivision of ἔρωσ' beauty is his *youthfulness*—proven by the fact that he is always with the young and runs away from the old—but why is he the *youngest* of the gods? He is *wholly* young, young in every respect—therefore the *youngest* (god). Cf. “idea” of beauty = αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν {the beautiful itself}—is of course τὸ κάλλιστον {most beautiful}.

All other gods are *older* than ἔρωσ → all other gods are more or less *old*, and hence more or less *ugly*.

195b5 only love of similar for similar: the theme of the pederasts—but not used by Agathon for this purpose: he is *not* concerned with defense of pederasty.

195b6-c6 What does he grant to Phaedruss? Cf. 180b6-8. But does he grant that ἔρωσ is *not* in the beloved?—He disagrees with Hesiod & Parmenides—not with Homer although Homer too speaks of θεομαχίαι {battles of gods} (Rep. 378d3-5): he does {not—ed.} wish to blame Homer (→ δι) [the *oldest poet*: is there not a contrast between the blame of the old γῆρας {oldness} and the praise of Homer?]

Originally, Ἀνάγκη {Necessity} ruled over the gods, now Ἐρως rules (i.e. *not* Zeus is the king of the gods). If the stories told by Hesiod & Parmenides *are* true, ἔρως *vanquished* ἀνάγκη – yet ἔρως is the youngest god: he cannot always have ruled → ἀνάγκη must have ruled [→ the stories told by Hesiod & Parmenides *are* true [→the gods other than ἔρως lack ἀρετή {virtue}. Agathon tacitly opposes Aristophanes who implied that ἀνάγκη is stronger than ἔρως–.

Savage beginnings → progress—i.e. good ≠ old—as Phaedrus implied and no one, not even Aristophanes, contested (ἡ ἀρχαία φύσις {the *oldest* nature} is the model)—Agathon contests it (cf. *Legg.* III): the divination of ἀρχή = τέλος {end}. But Aristophanes contested already the assertion that ἔρως is the oldest god—implicitly → there is a progress of enlightenment, a progress of progress in the speeches: Ἐρως the oldest god; ἔρως younger than the Olympian gods; ἔρως explicitly the youngest god; ἔρως not a god at all.

If ἔρως is the oldest god, ἔρως affects *all* things → all things love: ἔρως is *not* specifically human (→ Eryximachus) ≠ ἔρως is not the oldest god: not all things love (Aristophanes: neither the cosmic gods nor the Olympian gods nor even the brutes) → Agathon in {195}e4-7 and 197a1-3.

195c6-e8 Ἐρως is tender, gentle, delicate.

195c7-d7 the praise of Homer (cf. the silence on Homer in c2)—yet: Homer praised not ἔρως, but Ἀτῆ {Atē}, the goddess of mischief [a) not a male god, but a female god, b) not love, but mischief → Homer conceived of ἔρως as something much *sterner* than Agathon does]. With due euphemism, the elegant (εὐσχήμων) poet Agathon suggests that the *oldest* of all poets could not have done justice to the *youngest* of all gods: only the *youngest* poet who is in his way eternally young, can do this. In the thought of the *ancients*, Ἀτῆ {Ate}, the daughter of Zeus, occupies the place which in the thought of the *moderns* is occupied by ἔρως: the softening of manners. {Note on the back:> no longer “guilt-ridden” and “fear-ridden” → Agathon transforms Ἀτῆ into ἔρως—something not-beautiful into something beautiful. ≠ Aristophanes: the limping god Hephaestus who was *deceived* by his wife *alone* of the gods understands ἔρως—ἔτι {besides}, Homer places the softness of Ἀτῆ only in her *feet*, not in her whole being, as Agathon does (e7). Homer Il. 19.92-94 continues: βλάπτουσ’ ἀνθρώπους {she who damages/hurts human beings}.

195d7-e8 Another correction of Homer: Ἐρως does not walk on such hard things as heads or skulls.

195e3: souls are the *softest* of beings → e5-6: souls *as* souls are soft, but ἦθη {characters} may be σκληρά {hard}—cf. 196a3—

<30> 195e4-7 Ἐρως does not dwell in the souls of *all* gods and men—he does not dwell in the souls of the hard or harsh gods—yet which god is harder and harsher than Ares, and ἔρως dwells in the soul of Ares (cf. 196d2) → ἔρως *makes* all souls soft [Und dennoch hat die harte Brust {Even the hard heart ... —a line from a German folk-song, ed.}]

196a1-7 Ἐρως is ὑγρός (wet, fluid, loose, pliant, serpentine, languishing [melting]) of *shape* (εἶδος)—[*the* εἶδος does not become a theme of Agathon]—therefore, he can pass through every soul, for every soul as soul is soft. *This* constitutes his συμμετρία: he makes himself symmetric to everybody—his *symmetry is his all-pliancy*—[by being pliant to all, he is also pliant to the ἄμετροι [measureless]—no distinction between noble and base ἔρως: ἔρως is as *such* noble.]

196a7-b3 ἔρως' beauty of *color* or *complexion*: since he *dwells* among those of beautiful color, he must possess beautiful colors—!

Agathon on ἔρως' *beauty*—i.e. the beauty of his *body*—he is young, delicate, of a pliant shape and of beautiful color—cf. *Rhet.* I 5.11, 13: Agathon omits *strength* and *size*—but: these 4 qualities are not sufficient for making a human being beautiful → *nothing is said of human shape*—ἔρως has the beauty of a *serpent* or a *butterfly* as much as the beauty of a human shape → b4-5: the enumeration of ἔρως' beautiful qualities is not complete.

196b4-5 (cf. 195a7)—Ἐρως' *goodness* is not his κάλλος → ἀρετή {virtue} is not καλόν {beautiful}—for: beauty = beauty of the *body*.

the 4 parts of beauty —in the sequel, *the 4 parts of goodness*
youth justice
delicacy σωφροσ. [moderation] for a
similar parallel (cf. virtues of the body and the virtues of the soul), s. *Legg.* 631b6ff.

pliancy ἀνδρεία {courage} (cf. ad c3-d5)

beautiful color σοφία {wisdom}

196b6-c3 the greatest: not justice, but the combination of justice (not hurting others) and immunity to injustice (not being hurt)

ἔρως rules as a king over the *gods* (195c6) and the laws are the kings of the *city* [there is no connection between these two ruler-ruled relationships—for ἔρως' rule is gentle, and the rule of the νόμοι {laws} is not—Agathon is even more unpolitical than Aristophanes?]

196c3-d5 the argument: a very great coward of the greatest pliancy could control the bravest without *being* the bravest—cf. also the fact that ἔρως cannot be touched by βία {violence} (b9-c1)—Agathon *κωμῶδει* τὸν θεὸν {treats the god comically}

196d1-2 the transition from the self-subsisting god ἔρως to the ἔρως-for in Ares (cf. already c5-6: is ἔρως a kind of pleasure?)

196d1-2 the heterosexual love—

196d5-6 the account of ἔρως' σοφία {eros' wisdom} (≠ of his beauty) claims to be *complete*—silence on the account of his justice, *moderation*, and courage

196d6-e1 Agathon praises his τέχνη as Eryximachus did his → cf. ad e1-6 (≠ his Muse, as Aristophanes)—for Aristophanes did not lay claim to wisdom because his concern was with return to the ἀρχαία φύσις {ancient nature} which antedates the very possibility of wisdom. And:

196e1-6 Ἔρως is wise *first* because he is a poet and the one who makes others poetic [but does not say that ἔρως is indispensable for poetry {LS' note on the back:} → his τέχνη {art} is as love-less as Er[yximachus]→ the φύσει ἄριστοι {best by nature} who are genuinely ἄριστοι {best, pl.} precisely because they are *not* inspired by ἔρως, as *Phaedrus* said (179a9)—perhaps Homer was such a poet?]

196e6-197a3 Ἔρως is wise *secondly* and *centrally* because the ποίησις {making}, i.e. the γένεσις {generation} and the φύσις {nature} of *all* ζῶα {animals} is his work. Tacit exclusion of pederasty. And: there was no γένεσις and φύσις of *any* ζῶα *prior* to ἔρως—the *gods* did not come into being by generation, through parents—were they *always*? or *how* did they come into being? Agathon does not answer these questions, for he deals only with *one* god, ἔρως: Ἔρως was *not* always, for he is the *youngest* god—he was *not* generated by parents (he agrees with *Phaedrus* in many things—195b6—and *especially* in this: 178b2-3)—for every generation by parents *presupposes* Ἔρως.

Ἔρως' rule was preceded by that of Ἀνάγκη {Necessity} (cf. ad 195b6-c6): did Ἀνάγκη produce Ἔρως? but if this were the case, how could Ἔρως be simply the *opposite* of Ἀνάγκη?

197a3-b9 Ἔρως is wise *thirdly* by being the inspirer of all *handling* of τέχνηαι {arts}—

197a3-6 *fame* in any art is due to being touched by ἔρως—e.g. fame in poetry (≠ poetry *itself*)

<31> 197a6-b3 He mentions only *gods* who became famous in the arts—because they were led by ἐπιθυμία {desire} and ἔρως (ἔρως = ἐπιθυμία—not a god). 5 gods and 7 arts.

The central *art* is μουσική [musical] → to make us see the contrast with 196d6-e6: poetry (≠ fame for poetry) does not need ἔρως.

The central god is Hephaestus—love for *whom* made him famous in his art? love for his wife Aphrodite? Hephaestus is also famous for the love of his wife Aphrodite for Ares—did *Aphrodite & Ares* become famous as inventors by virtue of their love? what is that ἔρως which inspires the invention of the arts? (cf. also the role of Hephaestus in *Aristophanes'* speech) → Contrary to *Aristophanes*, Agathon conceives of ἔρως as *civilizing* force. (cf. the silence on ἔρως in *bt-3*—beginning from “Muses”).

197b3 through ἔρως Zeus learned to rule gods and men—Zeus rules men too—but the *cities* are ruled by *laws* (196c2-3) → no clear connection between the rule of Zeus or ἔρως and the rule of *laws*.

Zeus rules gods (and men), but Ἐρως rules Zeus (195c6): did Ἐρως teach Zeus how to rule Ἐρως? or is Ἐρως not a god at all? cf. ἐπιθυμία καὶ ἔρως {desire and eros} in a7.

197b3-5 Since ἔρως taught Zeus to rule *gods and men*, there arose friendship and peace among the *gods*: must the gods rule men so that there can be peace among the gods? are men absorbed into the gods or vice versa? Ἐρως is no longer an absolute: but: Ἐρως of—i.e. of *beauty*.

197b5-7 He now explicitly grants the truth of the stories told by *Hesiod & Parmenides*. (cf. 195c3).

197b7-9 Peace & friendship arose among the gods—not since Ἐρως *rules* (195c6) but since this god *came into being* or *sprang forth*—from what or through what? out of nothing and through nothing? then he is nothing—as a self-subsisting being. We noted some changes from Ἐρως as a self-subsisting being, i.e. a god, to a ἔρως as an activity of the soul or something-for → as a *god*, ἔρως is *nothing*, but he is most powerfully *in* the souls [hence he has no human shape]. As a self-subsisting being, ἔρως is nothing—yet we *speak* of him as a self-subsisting being—πως {some-how} he is a self-subsisting being: he *becomes* a self-subsisting {being} through *poetry*, through *tragic* poetry, for poetry as poetry *precedes* ἔρως (196e1-6) and ἔρως rules Zeus; more simply: the other gods *presuppose* ἔρως—for they have *parents*: their self-subsistence breaks down with Ἐρως' self-subsistence.

Ἐρως is ἔρως τοῦ κάλλους {of beauty} or more precisely ἐρᾶν τοῦ κάλλους {loving of beauty}.

Now, we have seen that Agathon uses καλόν only in the sense of bodily beauty—he never applies καλόν to the virtues → *the love of bodily beauty is the ground for everything good for gods & men*. But: ἐρᾶν τοῦ κάλλους {loving the beauty} may also mean: love of *honors* (cf. {Xenophon's} *Memor.* III beg.) → φιλοτιμία {love of honor} is not merely a byproduct of ἔρως (*Phaedrus*)

but a *kind* of ἔρως: the love of *fame* → the gods who became famous as artisans-artists, were indeed inspired by ἔρως, but not by ἔρως for bodily beauty but by the ἔρως for *fame*. The gods were the originators of civilisation, not indeed out of φιλανθρωπία {philanthropy} but out of φιλοτιμία.

Agathon is the first to transcend the level of bodily love—since ἔρως is on the highest level love of fame, ἔρως is in *harmony* with civilisation (≠ Aristophanes).

But: what about Agathon's own ἔργον {function}? He owes his *fame* as a poet to his love of fame—his poetry *itself*, his *wisdom* is not connected with ἔρως (cf. ad 196d6-e6): he has *no* ἔρως for wisdom.

Through “loving the beautiful things” all good things have arisen for both gods and men → via the *gods'* love of fame first? or was *human* love of fame sufficient?

197c1-3 Ἐρως being himself as the first most beautiful and most good, is thereafter responsible for the others' possessing other such like things (i.e. beautiful and good things)—prior to ἔρως, there were no beautiful and good things—the gods themselves were not beautiful and good.

c2: “the others” are human beings.

197c3-6 The poetic expression par exc.: ἔρως causes peace among *men* (only among men [≠ gods] - ≠ 195c5-6 and 197b8-9)—surely (ad 197b7-9), ἔρως as *human* love of fame is a sufficient motivation for establishing peace among men. But this limitation of ἔρως to *human* things is contradicted by the next 2 items: how can ἔρως be responsible for the quieting of winds and waves? Answer: *metaphorically*—if we compare the *passions* to strong seas etc. <32> The 4th & last item is again *human*—but not exactly a characteristic effect of ἔρως as either sexual desire or love of fame: the lie implied in the *metaphoric* description of the *true* effects of ἔρως leads to a lie regarding the effects of ἔρως.

197d1-5 ἔρως affects only human beings.

197d5-6 the gods are not wise [but ἔρως is wise: 196d5ff.] →

197e2, 4-5 ἔρως is *not* god. ἔρως the all-cheater, all-beguiler, all-enchanter—the inspirer in particular of Agathon, the *tragic* poet.

197e1-2: ἔρως *not* a στρατηγός {general}—as in Aristophanes' speech.

197d1-e5 Ἐρως is τὸ ἀγαθόν {the good}—not only *desire* for ἀγαθόν → Ἐρως is not ἔρως → Ἐρως is nothing.

197e6-8 Addressed to *Phaedrus* (cf. 194e1, 195a8, b6, c1): *I, Agathon, am the poet who has done what according to you no poet has done* (177a5-b1)—I have done my utmost (≠ Pausanias: what I could improvise 185c4-5; cf. also Eryximachus 188e1-4 and even Aristophanes 193d6-e3)

Summary of Agathon's speech

Starting point: he is a tragic poet → he *represents* tragic poetry—but he is not as a tragedian what Aristophanes is as a comedian—his vanity, his petty insincerities, his μαλακία {softness}: too obvious and for external κάλλος—the ἀπαλότης {delicacy} of his *speech*: nothing hard—the souls are μαλακωτάτοις {most soft} (195e3-4)—ἔρως harmonizes *everything* (195e3-4).—his speech is half *playful* (197e7), free from all *passion* because his ἔρως does not contain *suffering* (contrast with Aristophanes where there is passion in ἔρως because there is suffering in it)—his τέχνη is loveless (cf. ad 196d7-e1) and yet enchanting—shall we say that he is a *degenerate* tragic poet, an *epigonic* tragic poet? But: Agathon is closer to Socrates than any other speaker—he sits closest to him and he alone is awake at the end together with Socrates. And his doctrine: 1) ἔρως is ἔρως τοῦ κάλλους or τῶν καλῶν (not only of beautiful human beings nor of opposites nor of the ἀρχαία φύσις) and does not recognize anything superior to it which is alien to it. 2) ἔρως universal among the ζῶα (≠ Eryximachus? Aristophanes) (cf. ad 195b6-c6 in fine). 3) Agathon is the only one who raises the question regarding ἔρως *himself*. → quâ epigonic tragic poet, he has undergone the influence of *philosophy*: he cannot take tragedy as seriously as the original tragic poets: but even in its degeneracy, tragedy is superior to comedy—in which respect?

His praise of τέχνη {arts} (196d-197b) → he is not a rebel against νόμος {law} (ad 194d1, e5-6) (≠ comedy is such a rebellion)—in harmony with civilisation, with “κόσμος {cosmos}”, for ἔρως is *also—above all* love of *fame* → silence about the cosmic gods (who lead back to chaos) and praise of the Olympian gods as originators of civilisation and as possessing νοῦς {mind} (→ silence about astronomy, the cosmic gods {LS' note on back:} implied in: Ἀνάγκη - cf. Empedocles B 116} and theoretic music).

Yet: he does not *believe* in the Olympian gods: he is the only one who makes the *being* of a god his *theme*—he *faces* that problem, whereas the others dismiss it. His primary thesis: Eros the *youngest* god and yet no parents → the *question* of his *origins*—no human shape—nothing self-subsisting: ἐρᾶν {loving}. The *youngest* god: the Olympian gods cannot have been *generated* → they have come into being out of nothing and through nothing if they are taken as they present themselves—but: they were *made* (Phaedrus 246a; cf. Simile on Cave): by *whom*? By *the* makers: the poets—i.e. the *tragic* poets—they are the makers of the gods of human shape: they

deify—(Aristophanes [\neq Agathon] *makes Zeus speak*: but καταγέλαστος {ridiculous})—they create the gods because they are inspired by love of κάλλος: they “idealize” men—they do this in order to raise man’s stature (beings looking like men but who are deathless etc.)—they are the true founders of civility → their *solemnity*—this is higher than comedy = (rebellion against the gods) provided that tragic poets *know* what they are doing, provided they are free from the spell which they create (as Agathon is): they *establish* τὸ καλὸν ψεῦδος {the beautiful lie}—which the comic poet destroys.

Kinship between the gods and ἄρ. πολ. {short for “best regime”}—both are only λόγῳ {in speech} —but: the logos *leading up* to ... {sic} is suppressed (cf. 195a8-b5: the phenomenon \neq hypothetical)

→ ἔρω (and the other gods) are mere objects of νοῦς {mind} (197e5): Agathon has *seen* ἔρω.

Kinship between the gods and the *ideas*? Eros is desire but it does not desire—cf. the idea of a dog (= the dog itself) which is not a dog.

But: this superiority of tragedy is not *simply* true: both tragedy & comedy are *equally* necessary —

tragic—enchanting

comic—disenchanted (common sense—prosaic—cf. *Don Quixote* the clean shirts)

<33> Heraclitus fr. 32 ἐν μόνον σοφὸν {the one wise thing} it wishes and does not wish to be called Zeus – μανία {madness} it wishes → tragedy and φρόνησις {prudence} it does not wish → comedy to be called Zeus

→ tragedy superior to comedy not simply but due to the ὑπόθεσις {hypothesis} of *Symposium*.

1] the contest between philosophy and poetry. *Symposium*. Plato’s *reply* to Aristophanes (his use of the *Frogs*) who had attacked Socrates and Euripides in the same breath—but: why was there a sympathy between Socrates and Euripides (tragedy) in the first place? what is the *principle* behind the antagonism of Socrates vs. Aristophanes? The philosopher not a tragic but a comic figure: philosopher presented only in comedy (\neq tragedy) and in the comedy necessarily from the point of view of ἔνδοξα {received opinions} → comedy *attacks* philosophy → comedy (\neq tragedy) *presents itself* as anti-philosophic.

ἔτι {besides}—τὸ γελοῖον {the ridiculous} \neq τὸ σεμνόν {the solemn} or τὸ σπουδαῖον {the serious} → comedy presents the serious *beneath* τὸ γελοῖον: first impression is τὸ γελοῖον—not dignified.

Tragedy presents γελοῖον *beneath* the serious: the first impression is τὸ σπουδαῖον: dignified (εὐσχήμων {dignified})—philosophy must be εὐσχήμων and present *itself* as εὐσχήμων, if it is to fulfill its function.

2] Socrates's ὕβρις {hubris}—atheism = ideas (cf. *Euthyphro*)—abstraction from the soul = from the cosmic gods → esoterically ideas and exoterically Olympian gods = *recognition* of the Olympian gods = re-enacting the ἔργον {function} of the tragic poets {LS note back of the page;} [P.{eter} H.{einrich} v.{on} Bl.{anckenhagen}: Aristophanes' speech preceded by φύσει {by nature} truth → taken care of by a physician → Aristophanes' theme is φύσις; Agathon's speech preceded by a νόμῳ {by convention} truth → taken care of by an ἀρχων {archon} → Agathon's theme is νόμος.]

Paus.{anias} & Eryx.{imachus} the perfect erotic ass'n {association} = noble ἔρως is a *combination* of *heterogeneous* elements: love of καλόν and love for bodily pleasures {in the line beneath;} opposition of the first: αἰσχρόν

Implies: ἔρως *proper* is directed towards bodily pleasure

≠ the 2 poets, inspired ἔρως is single minded, not subject to something extraneous. Aristophanes: attacks love of καλόν—ἔρως → *embrace*—but: this means more than it seems → ἔρως τοῦ οἰκείου {eros of one's own} = αἰσχρόν {shameful/the ugly} → comedy the element of which is τὸ αἰσχρόν {the shameful/the ugly}

Agathon: ἔρως *only* love for καλόν {beautiful}—tragic poet: κάλλος {beauty} element of tragedy—visible, manifest beauty—(the orderliness of his presentation).

Transcript 5.3

LEO STRAUSS, TWO LETTERS ON PLATO'S SYMPOSIUM (1959)

Editorial Note: These two letters addressed to Seth Benardete, one of Strauss's star students and the editor of Strauss's course on Plato's *Symposium*, are found in Leo Strauss Papers, box 18, folder 17, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library—the same folder that contains the Notes on Plato's Symposium (transcript 5.1 in this volume). Numbers in the curly brackets refer to the page numbers of the typescript. Additions are all indicated by square brackets. The underlinings are replaced with italics.

{1} November 14, 1959

Dear Mr. Benardete,

I am now in the neighborhood of 205e. A question: Do you know of any other case where a woman says to a man "O comrade" (205e3)? I believe that Socrates appears here through the mask of Diotima and addresses his comrade Aristophanes.

As for the work as a whole the key can be said to be 172b1 (Alcibiades) and c3ff. Alcibiades is again in Athens, i.e. 407, and the book gives the true story of the scandal of 416 (profanation or divulgation of the mysteries). Not Alcibiades divulged any mysteries, he came in after everything was over, but Socrates (and somehow Aristophanes (189d3-4)). The accuser Aristophanes was present at the blasphemy and participated in it. In brief, the work presents Socrates's ὕβρις [hybris]. It reminds of the *Frogs* (contest between two tragedians decided with a view to Alcibiades) but it surpasses the *Frogs* in comprehensiveness (the intra-tragic contest is

over, it is a contest between all forms of Athenian wisdom and the decision is made by Alcibiades). It is narrated by men other than Socrates and thus connected with the *Parmenides* and the *Phaedo*: the latter are the dialogues exhibiting the young Socrates who also was exhibited in the *Clouds* and Aristophanes is present in the *Symposium*: but above all the Socrates conversing with Diotima is the young Socrates. The title is in a way unique; ordinarily the title indicates a participant or in seven cases the subject matter (*Republic*, *Laws*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Apology*, *Minos*, *Hipparchus*); the only title akin to that of the *Symposium* is that of the *Epinomis*. The *Symposium* is the only dialogue explicitly devoted to a god; the *Epinomis* is devoted to the cosmic gods. The *Symposium* abstracts from the cosmic gods; it leads therefore just as the *Euthyphron* to an atheistic conclusion (Socrates's ὕβρις [hybris]). For eros, the most plausible of the Olympian gods, even eros proves to be no god at all. The cosmic gods come up, though not explicitly as gods, only in Aristophanes' speech (original man looked like the cosmic gods and even moved like them (eros belongs here rather to the cosmic gods than to the Olympian gods)).

1) Phaedrus. 178b8-II. One must restore the ms. reading. Parmenides in the center because he praises eros most highly and he indicates the cause of eros. This praise of Parmenides is connected with the fact that Phaedrus's speech is unique, separated by a hiatus from the next speech; he realizes that the beloved is higher than the lover although or because the god is in the lover. He looks at eros from the point of view of the beloved (of himself), from the point of view of his gain. In all these points he anticipates Socrates. The first three speeches present eros as subordinate to something extraneous to it: gain, moral virtue, and techne [art]. The three last speeches present eros as "sovereign": love of αἰσχος [aischos = shame] love of καλός [kalos = beautiful], and love of the good.

2) Pausanias. This is the only deliberative speech occurring in Plato; in the guise of a praise of the Athenian νόμος [nomos = law] it is a proposal of a change of that νόμος (184c7-8). An elderly lover needs support by his respectability for his erotic success; he is the natural representative of the moralistic presentation of eros. Also, his presentation of the perfect erotic association is a parody of the polis which also has two heterogeneous origins.

3) Eryximachus. The basis is Empedocles: love of the similar leads to chaos, love of the opposites to cosmos; in order to defend pederasty—for the defense of pederasty is the subject begun by Pausanias, continued by Eryximachus (185e6-186a1) and completed by Aristophanes; {2} in order to

defend pederasty Eryximachus must assert the superiority of love of the similar and this brings him into obvious difficulties especially since he also wishes to praise his τέχνη [techne = art] (e.g. is it the task of medicine to cure men of heterosexuality or to bring about heterosexual relations, abhorred by nature, for the sake of the preservation of the species?). His pan-eroticism of Empedoclean origin leads just as in Empedocles himself (fr. 111) to the absolute rule of τέχνη [art]; for if love rules everything we humans must make a distinction between the right kind of love and the wrong kind (Heracleitus fr. 102).¹ We also must not forget that Empedocles' poem is addressed to Pausanias. Also Eryximachus's ending with a praise of μαντική [mantike = divination] reminds of Empedocles. Eryximachus's speech is in a way the central speech and therefore one may say that Empedocles is the target of the whole discussion.

4) Aristophanes. By nature men were simply cosmic beings; and the only link with the Olympian gods was the fact that they had genitals and we must add that they were not limited to mating seasons; the specificum is not rationality but sexiness. Not limited like the brutes by nature, man had to be limited by νόμος [nomos = law, convention]: the scission by Zeus (the beginning of Zeus' speech (190c7) is identical with the beginning of the whole work). Note also Apollo's blundering: he used up the skin of the whole for the half (hence the wrinkles), the other half skinless perished and therefore eros is hopelessly tragic. Incidentally, constant and through comparison of this story with Protagoras' story in the *Protagoras* is indispensable (the connection of the work as a whole with the *Protagoras* is obvious because of five of the characters). Eros is quest for one's own flesh and blood, most radically incestuous (cf. *Birds* and *Clouds*). More generally, love of one's own, and therefore also of the fatherland (cf. Euripides' *Phoenician Women* 350 or thereabouts). This is the alternative to Agathon according to whom love is quest for the beautiful. Abstraction from the former is characteristic of the *Symposium*.

5) Agathon. The most interesting passage in Agathon's speech is the verses in 197c5-6: eros' work limited to human beings (peace among *men*), the *metaphoric* extension of the effect of eros to winds and waves, i.e. human passions, and hence finally a non-metaphoric untrue statement about eros' effect (sleep). Agathon lets us see that eros as a self-subsisting being is nothing, since he has come to being out of nothing; he is only by virtue of the poet, i.e. the tragic poet, and this is true of all gods. I changed my mind regarding Plato's view of tragedy: tragedy is not the conflict between two opposite καλά [beautiful things], but rather reconciliation

through the gods; therefore the relation of comedy and tragedy is: construction of the gods and destruction of the gods, enchanting and disenchanting. Both are equally necessary but if the tragic poet knows what he is doing he is higher than the comic poet, because his construction includes the destruction (223d5; “by art,” and the statement cannot be inverted). This does not do away with the fact that Aristophanes is superior as an individual to the individual Agathon: both Aristophanes and Socrates begin their speeches with the same words.

Aristophanes begins with a bodily predicament which is healed by a physician. Socrates begins with a moral predicament, an oath which embarrasses him now, which is healed by himself, for he is an Odysseus (198c2-5). With an unsurpassable insolence he makes clear in the same context (d) that his praise of eros will consist in being silent about its seamy side (i.e. about eros as love of one’s own).

As for Socrates’s speech, I would like say now only that 203dff. make it clear that eros has absolutely nothing to do with the gods: {3} he resembles only his mother, although he seems to resemble also his father. This is due to an ambiguity regarding Poverty. Is she sheer ignorance or dissatisfaction with ignorance? The problem was stated by Aristophanes in his *Plutus* (550–554). I just noted that in the Diotima section as distinguished from all other sections there is no reference to its being reported by Aristodemus or Apollodorus. This observation is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for understanding the strange goings-on regarding: “I said” (ἔφην, εἶπον, etc.); cf. in particular 202c5, 205c3, 10, d9. Mr. Gildin² who has been so good as to take down this dictation tells me that this lecture course will be typed pretty soon. Still, I believe that I have given you the highlights. With kindest regards,

Sincerely yours,

{1} November 30, 1959

Dear Mr. Benardete,

Socrates’s speech in the *Banquet* consists of 7 parts (= to the number of speeches in the work). I Introduction on the true rhetoric (corresponds to Phaedrus’s speech—foreshadows the *Phaedrus*). II Dialogue with Agathon. III Dialogue of the young Socrates with Diotima (the three dialogues narrated but not by Socrates (*Parmenides*, *Phaedo*, *Banquet*) are the only dialogues revealing the young Socrates). A) the nature of eros B) the human need for eros C) (207a5 to end) a) eros in procreation b) eros in ambition c) eros of the beautiful. The center is IIIB: eros is neither love

of the beautiful (against Agathon) nor love of one's own (against Aristophanes): in IIIC both love of one's own and love of the beautiful are restored but the restoration takes place without the restoration of the gods: eros as love of one's own and love of the beautiful is the root of the Olympian gods (love of deathless beauty and love of one's own, i.e. the fatherland and dike [justice], hence the avenging gods). Diotima's speech effects a catharsis of eros. IIICb is a philosophic presentation of poetry and IIICc a poetic presentation of philosophy: Socrates wins the contest by being able to give these two presentations. I believe that Alcibiades's speech is a poetic presentation of Socrates, which is in one way utterly ridiculous: he proves that Socrates has hybris by proving that he has the greatest moderation; he speaks of the inner beauty of Socrates, of the fact that he alone knows Socrates's *pragma* [business], but in that famous night he did not discover in any way Socrates's secret teaching. The presentation of the poets—desire for immortal fame leads to immortal works—poses the question of Socrates's not writing. The answer I believe is that the perfect writing is tragedy containing comedy, not the other way round. And Socrates could not write tragedy (see *Gorgias*, the Callicles section). It is particularly amusing that Alcibiades presents Socrates as a kind of popular preacher of repentance, Savonarola style; if Socrates had been such a man he would have written.

One can figure out the personnel of the *Banquet* by considering that all combinations of the three following alternatives must be in. a) lover - beloved b) old—young c) cautious—soft - manly. The speeches not reported (end of Phaedrus's speech) are those of those combinations which are unworthy. This calculation is confirmed if one assumes that the total number of invited guests plus the host is nine, and there are two uninvited guests. Socrates represents two combinations: old—manly—lover and old - manly—beloved. Aristophanes I believe is old—soft - beloved—his lover is Plato.

As ever yours,
Leo Strauss

Notes

1. "To God all things are fair, good and just, but men suppose some things are unjust, some just" (Diels-Kranz 22 B 102).

2. Hilail Gildin (1928–2015), a student of Leo Strauss and a professor at Queens College, City University of New York.