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*Socratic Askesis in the Symposium**

Abstract: The present paper attempts to explain Socrates' remark in *Symposium* 212b, where the expression “diapherontos askein” is used to describe Socrates' attitude towards erotic matters [*ta erotika*]. The analysis of the dialogue shows that a human being with a reliable power of Eros and knowledge about the proper way of life should strengthen their character virtues through self-restraint and justice. This power is a natural component of every person, and the knowledge about life can be obtained both from the *Symposium* itself and from the speech of Diotima. Furthermore, in the apology delivered by Alcibiades (as well as in the *Apology* and *Phaedo*), Socrates is presented to the reader as the perfect moral ideal that serves as a criterion for leading a proper life. While the two aforementioned elements provide a sufficient condition for being a philosopher, they do not guarantee access to transcendent reality. If this access is to be attained at all, it is only through hard work on the moral and intellectual aspect of being human.

Keywords: Plato, Symposium, askesis

Plato's *Symposium*¹ is undoubtedly a masterpiece of Western literature. The topics presented in this dialogue are not only the starting-point of various philosophical dissertations but also an inspiration for other works of art from antiquity

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¹ The title of Plato's dialogue is translated into Polish as *Uczta* (1957, 2012) or *Biesiada* (1993). That both translations can be misleading argues Wesoly 2013: 29.

to the present time.² This dialogue can be recognised as an example of a frame narrative literary work and its main part are the six speeches about Eros delivered by the participants of the meeting in the house of the poet Agathon. The speeches are interlarded by the interludes, which are of varying length and subjects. An interpretation of these in-between parts can determine the role and meaning of the given speech in the whole work. Socrates makes the last speech and he inserts the subsequent one given by Diotima—a soothsayer and priestess from Mantinea. After quoting her words, Socrates says:

This, Phaedrus and the rest of you, was what Diotima told me. I was persuaded. And once persuaded, I try to persuade others too that human nature can find no better workmate [*ktēma*] for acquiring this than Love. That's why I say that every man must honor Love, why I honor the rites of Love [*ta erōtika*] myself and practice them in different ways [*diapherontōs askein*], and why I commend them to others. Now and always I praise the power and courage of Love so far as I am able. Consider this speech, then, Phaedrus, if you wish, a speech in praise of Love. Or if not, call it whatever and however you please to call it (*Smp.* 212b1–c3; transl. Nehamas, Woodruff with changes).

In this paper, I would like to answer the question: what does it mean for Socrates “to practice the rites of Love in different ways”?³ To answer the question, it is required above all to reconstruct and to interpret what it is that Socrates is persuaded about.

Just after the subject of the discussion is proposed by young Phaedrus and at the very beginning of the meeting, Socrates issues a quite important declaration: he says that as a matter of fact, he has knowledge about erotic matters.⁴ It is worth pondering this declaration from the historical perspective. If it is accepted that the symposium took place in 416 B.C. and Socrates met Diotima in 440 B.C. (Strauss 2001: 20, 185), the intervening twenty-four years have fixed not only a period of time that Socrates has practised the erotic matters, but during which a cognitive change has taken place, in the form of the transition from belief to knowledge. A close connection is achieved—as it seems—between *praxis* and *theoria*. This connection, however, does not take on a casual character as was the case in the philosophy of nature, nor is it a kind of simply empirical (practical) confirmation of the given information. The change probably came about in quite a different way, which goes far beyond the natural sphere and—as we will see—in close relation to the natural as well.⁵

² About the reception of the *Symposium* in antiquity see Pacewicz 2014 and Leshner 2006.

³ Plato uses the adverb *diapherontōs*, which is usually translated in the sense of the intensity of acting. See Witwicki: “szczególniej”; Serafin: “z zapalem”; Nehamas & Woodruff: “with special diligence”; Robin: “tout particulier d'exercise”.

⁴ Plato, *Smp.* 177d7–8. It is worth mentioning that Socrates is presented in *Lysis* as the specialist (a sage—*sophos*) in erotic matters. Socrates proposes there a thesis that *ho eromenos* is praiseworthy only when he is captured (*Ly.* 206a1–2). A desire realized through the eros is aimed at the particularly valuable values (acquisitions), and there are friends among them (*Ly.* 211d6–212a7). In the *Symposium* it is the physician Eryximachus who claims the right to the theoretical and practical knowledge about erotic matters. He limits, however, the scope of the knowledge just to what is perceived through the senses but he also discerns that the scope can be both global (cosmic) and local (human) one (see Plato, *Smp.* 186c6; 187c5; 188d2). According to Eryximachus the specialists in *ta erotika* are not only Socrates but also Agathon (*Smp.* 193e5).

⁵ In the early part of the dialogue, Socrates determines partly and implicitly the scope of *ta erotika*. He makes it with reference to one of the participants of the meeting—Aristophanes. According to Socrates, the comedy writer does not flinch to prise the Eros, because his whole attention is directed to

Naturally, before Socrates met Diotima, he held some beliefs about erotic matters. The priestess from Mantinea says that he has found himself in a certain way to be an expert [*deinos*] in this field,⁶ although he could not explain the role of Eros (the cause of *aitia*) in the process of natural reproduction of living beings (*Smp.* 207c2–7). It should be again stressed that Socrates' expertise was not based on the knowledge he possessed at the moment he met Diotima, but that it is by this time grounded on the knowledge he has at the moment he participates in the symposium.⁷ So what Socrates has believed about Eros was not of course connected with nature or something supranature. This belief is presented—I think—in the short conversation between Socrates and Agathon and before the words of Diotima are quoted (*Smp.* 199c–201c). In this passage—as is well known—it is stated that Eros means a kind of activity, which is aimed at some object (*erōs tinos*—*Smp.* 199d1), and it is a kind of the two-element relation (*E*). The components of the relations are a subject (*S*) and an object (*O*), which are not identical ($S \neq O$).⁸ *E* also has a temporal dimension. Socrates' attention is drawn to describe *S* first of all. He states that if someone is in a way marked by Eros, he or she desires *O* and that means that (I) he or she does not have *O* (some deficiency [*endeia*] characterises a subject) or (II) if he or she has *O* in the present time (T_1), he or she desires to have it also in the future (T_2). Referring to Agathon's speech, it is accepted that *O* is identical with the set of what is beautiful, and binding it with (I), it is recognized that *S* lacks *O* that is to say *S* does not have what is beautiful. The identity of 'to have' and 'to be some' in the natural language is also implicitly accepted,⁹ so it can be stated that *S* is not beauty.

This (re)construction of Socrates' view seems to show that his foreknowledge is the dialectical skill (Reeve 2012: 185), which is carried out merely at the level of language and without being appropriately grounded in ontology and epistemology. Meanwhile, this view accepts implicitly and without justification a number of ontological and epistemological assumptions. With reference to a subject touched by Eros, it is assumed for example, that: (1) *S* is able to recognize *O* as different from *S*, (2) *S* is able to judge *O* positively (so *S* sees the difference between good and bad quality), (3) *S* is able to desire or to want *O*, (4) *S* is aware of time's flow. These premises appear to exclude inanimate beings and plants from *S*, but they do not clearly establish whether *S* is an animal or a human being (the latter can naturally be acknowledged to be a kind of animal). What is more, the whole argument is based on the unjustified dichotomy between "to have" and "to lack" ("to

Dionysos and Aphrodite (*Smp.* 177e1–2). However, these two gods are not mentioned in Aristophanes' speech, and it is why Socrates' statement does not apply to Aristophanes' beliefs, but his way of living, which consists mainly of drinking wine and having sex. See Roochnik 1987: 117–129; Rowe 1998: 136.

⁶ So he would be proclaimed the sage; see Plato, *Prt.* 341b.

⁷ See the remark at *Smp.* 198d1–2 [*deinos*] related to the statement in *Smp.* 177d7–8 [*epistasthai*].

⁸ This unidentity prevents probably autoeroticism, and it can be seen as the critic of the conception of the primordial human being from Aristophanes' speech or the critic of the narcissistic perspective of Eros from Agathon's speech. Diotima's view of Eros prevents, of course, both wrong perspectives on Eros. See Price 1989: 200 ff.

⁹ The examples can be found in Homer, e.g. *Od.* XII 435; XIX 38. There can be also taken into consideration phrases, in which the verb *echein* with the adverb appears—e.g. *eu echein* = "to be well," "to be happy" [*verbatim*: "to have well"] (similarly: *kalōs* [*kakōs*] *echein*).

not have”), which is transferred to the field of axiology (“beautiful”—“ugly” (“not beautiful”), “good”—“bad” (“not good”).

When Diotima comes to the fore, she begins by disposing of the last premise. She shows that Eros is really entangled in a more complicated structure, and that there is something in between the opposites, which is exemplified on the epistemological (*wisdom/knowledge/phronēsis* : *orthē doksa* : *amathia*), axiological (*agathon* : *mēde agathon*, *mēde kakon* : *kakon*) and ontological (*divinity* : *daimon* : *human being*) levels. This indirect element is that-which-binds-together [*sundesmos*] the items which taken separately have nothing in common with each other. Thus *sundesmos* has a special status and function—it is a dynamic and relatively independent (free) element (*Smp.* 202a–e). As the epistemological subject, it is neither wise nor stupid—it searches the justification [*logon didonai*] for its beliefs, i.e., it philosophises, but its dynamic state makes it impossible to achieve the justified knowledge (wisdom) permanently. As the axiological subject, it can attain the positive value—to become good and beautiful—but it cannot maintain this condition indefinitely, and the inevitable deterioration in its state is not in itself the same as being (becoming) bad. Finally, by being between the divine and human and connected with both elements, the subject may reach the deific sphere, which makes him a special person—a spiritual man [*daimonios anēr*], different from (and maybe even opposed to) ordinary men [*banausoī*] (*Smp.* 203a). The intellectual capability of such a person gains an additional, specific and emotive tendency (trend) to discover values and to find the reasons for them.¹⁰

The passage analysed above does not contain any mention of the practice [*askesis*] of Love itself, but it shows its *archē*, of which three aspects can be considered. Firstly, *the beginning* takes place only when the thinking human being starts *to care about* the values and their real justification. He or she must realize that they do not have such justification and they *should* have it. Secondly, *the principle* of the practice consists in the *constant* searching for the justification, because the subject is not sure that the discovered explanation is a definitive one; indeed, for some time, he or she can be quite sure that the explanation is not definitive. A consciousness that such approach to the life is important is manifested by an eagerness [*spoudē*] and a constancy of effort [*suntaxis*] to take up the examination again and again (*Smp.* 206b 2). Thirdly, the human being should *be possessed* by such an attitude, that is to say, he or she must feel a desire and acknowledge a given value’s justification as the *most crucial* goal in their life. In the perspective of the further discussion, it appears that the second condition (a permanence and intensity of the action) is hardest to fulfil, because the first and the third are given to mankind in a natural way.

The effect of the activation of erotic power in the living being is the state which Plato calls a pregnancy [*kuein*]. This state is what causes love to be expressed in a distinctive way, as Myles Burnyeat has noted (1977: 8). Diotima shows two main

¹⁰ The interpretation can be supported by the views from *Timaeus*, where *daimonion* is, in fact, a divine gift. It finds itself in the highest part of the human body, i.e. in the head, and it is partly identical with the soul. A connection between *Symposium* and *Timaeus* is stressed e.g. by Sheffield 2012: 128–130.

levels of this expression. The intellectual and emotive access to them is described by the verb “to initiate” [*muein*], and the second and higher level is called *telea kai epopitika*—all words which are taken from the Greek mysteries.¹¹ The priestess does not doubt that Socrates can attain the first level, and this is why the declaration he made and which is analysed here can concern precisely this level.

Two aspects make up the first step. The Eros manifests itself by the specific action [*praxis*] and its effect [*ergon*] which are made by a human being, who is considered to be a living being composed of body and soul (the ontological status of the latter is not precisely determined yet). Bodily pregnancy is possible when the individual reaches sexual maturity. The effect of sexual intercourse is not only the pregnancy itself, but also the existence of a harmonious community,¹² which participates by being cheerful and sharing the parent’s joy. With the coming of offspring, the parents acknowledge them as something that is most important, and they provide care for them. The primary forms of activity [*praksis*] are naturally sexual intercourse and an active concern for the children (*Smp.* 206b1–c1). It is also assumed that a pregnancy can be achieved only when the individual is sensually and emotionally able to engender an attraction (viz. a beauty) in the other human being with some involvement of the reason [*logismos*].¹³ The *physical* pregnancy gains fulfilment through the *physical* begetting of a *physical* beauty, and a *physical* joy and glee accompany it. Since according to Plato, the physical world is in a process of eternal and cyclical change, the process of giving birth (and dying respectively) is also eternal and cyclical—not individually, however, but on the level of a species (*Smp.* 207c9–e1).

The second aspect manifests itself in the spiritual sphere. After someone has reached his or her adulthood, the person who is incorporeally pregnant, searches for another person with a beautiful, noble and gifted soul (it would be good if the soul would also have a physically attractive body, but this is not a necessary condition). In this case, the activity [*praksis*] consists in that (1) someone “instantly teems with the ideas and arguments about virtue—the qualities a virtuous man should have and the customary activities in which he should engage and (2) so he tries to educate...” (*Smp.* 209b8–c2). The internal effect of the activity (1) is a virtue of *phronēsis* (which shows itself as moderation [*sōphrosunē*] in the individual dimension and as justice [*dikaïosunē*] in the social one), and (2) the external effects are great literary works, appropriately established national offices and justly enacted laws. The result of (2) is the erotic relation between two persons called “friendship” [*philia*],

¹¹ Plato, *Smp.* 209a5–210a2. For more about the allusions to the mysteries in the *Symposium* see Des Places 1981; Łapiński 2014. Sier (1997: 125 ff.) sets apart in the speech of Diotima the descriptive and normative (*Smp.* 207a5–209e4 and 209e5–212a7) aspects of Eros. The detailed structure of the Diotima’s speech is also showed and analysed by Casertano (1997).

¹² It would seem that in this case (on the level of *phusis*) we are dealing with love as the symmetric relation because both parents are engaged in the process, but the adjective “harmonious” shows that there is a hierarchy between them. It is so, because when someone perceives the world as an ordered whole [*kosmos*], there is no contradiction for them “between the notion of a ‘natural hierarchy’ and a ‘natural harmony’—they saw a harmony between upper and lower, and between rulers and ruled—a perspective we have long since abandoned as illusory” (Irby-Massie, Keyser 2002: 6).

¹³ It is possible that some form of the rationality is present also in the animals; see Sheffield 2006: 50–52.

which is more long-lasting and more beautiful than the relationship based on sensual and bodily grounds (*Smp.* 209a3–e4). What is interesting is that the fruits of (1) are exemplified by Homer’s and Hesiod’s literary works, by Lycurgus and his “saviours of Sparta”¹⁴ and by Solon’s laws. Considering this, we may become puzzled why Plato so highly estimates the works of two great poets here, if he criticises their epic work so profoundly in *Politeia*.¹⁵ Similarly, we may also ask why Plato gives consent to the author of Sparta’s power if he lives in the *polis* which lost the Peloponnesian War, and why Plato praises the democratic changes introduced by Solon if he disavows democracy in *Politeia*. However, his praise probably does not indicate acceptance of the content of the examples cited, but rather directs the reader’s attention to the fact that they represent products (1) which are the results of spiritual communion, (2) which concern values and (3) which are more long-lasting than human life. Their permanence is guaranteed by social memory (a transfer of the traditions from generation to generation), and the need to recall them is supported by *recognition and respect* towards the products (and frequently towards their authors). The reverence is that which causes the human being to *want* to act in accordance with them. Unfortunately, the spiritual sphere is afflicted by the same deficiency as the physical one—it is in perpetual change:

[...] none of [...] manners, customs, opinions, desires, pleasures, pains, or fears ever remains the same, but some are coming to be [...] while others are passing away. And what is still far stranger than that is that not only does one branch of knowledge come to be in us while another passes away and that we are never the same even in respect of our knowledge, but that each single piece of knowledge has the same fate (*Smp.* 207e2–208a3).

This problem concerns, naturally, the individual and episodic nature of the psychical experiences, and it could possibly be overcome by rising above the individual and a transition to the more general level. Even if that were the case, it still could not also assure ultimate stability, i.e. eternal permanence. Socrates/Plato was undoubtedly aware (thanks to the popularity of the doctrines offered by the representatives of the so-called ‘sophistic movement’ for instance) that the descriptive and normative retaining of the moral and ethical models in the above-mentioned manifestations may warrant their longevity at most, but not their everlasting immutability. This is why Diotima speaks of the higher level of the initiations which can be reached only when the lower one was appropriately passed [*orthōs*] (*Smp.* 210a4–5). What does this mean?

The stimulation by an *erōs* starts when people are young, and first of all it assumes bodily manifestation. Nevertheless, they should be aware that erotic activity should not be reduced only to physical reproduction—its effects should be the making of beautiful *logoi*. This assumes that people should be educated and that they should, during education, lose interest in the body. Namely, they come to realise that the body takes some action, the final results of which can be judged, and that the criterion for judgement cannot be in the corporal sphere. An *erastes* drives the

¹⁴ That the national institutions—especially military ones—are the case shows Dover (1980: 154).

¹⁵ If it is assumed that Solon is connected with the *strict* democratic legislation—it is possible but it could also be questioned; see Morrow 1993: 79 ff.

*eromenos*¹⁶—pursuant to the sensual perceiving—towards what is not carnal, i.e. towards a soul, and the new-discovered beauty in the other obliges them not only to produce beautiful speeches but most of all to also become a better person. The laws [*nomos*] are what directs human actions normatively. They are also incorporeal, and they are a systematic whole, i.e. an argument can be put forward [*logon didonai*] for the acceptance of a given law. Beauty is both in the matter of the laws—the values manifest themselves in them—and also in their form. The latter drives the subject towards further research—towards something that is more systematic than a legal system, that is first towards different kinds of knowledge [*epistēmē*], and towards knowledge as knowledge. The aim of climbing this existential, cognitive and moral ladder is of course to attain initiation into the “higher mysteries,” i.e., to see such magnificently described beauty itself (*Smp.* 210a–211d).

The fundamental division into two stages of the road to beauty might show that Socrates’ declaration—*autos timō ta erōtika kai diapherontōs*—could concern both of them. However, who is the Socrates depicted in the *Symposium*? The first hypothesis is that the designatum is the historical Socrates.¹⁷ If it is accepted—as mentioned above—that the assembly of the intellectual *creme de la creme* of the Athenian society took place in 416 B.C., and that Socrates’ meeting with Diotima¹⁸ happened about 440 B.C. when Socrates was around 30, the question “Do we know something about the practice by the historical Socrates of the elements from the first of the stages?” should be answered. There is no denying that he was not immune to erotic arousal. As it is well known, he had three children at the moment of his trial (*Ap.* 34d 7), and one of them was around twenty years-old. It is also well known that a turning point in his life came as a result of the announcement of the Delphic Oracle, and he began to discover the justification for his own and others’ actions. The most important goal of life became care for the soul [*epimeleia tēs psychēs*].¹⁹ However, taking into consideration only the Socrates we know from Plato’s *Apology*, the interests in law and knowledge itself can be doubted (*Ap.* 19c–e; 32b). Thus, this seems to indicate that this hypothesis should be rejected.

The second assumption would be that Plato hides behind the mask of Socrates, and that he describes his own road to the world of ideas. Diotima, therefore, is a fictional person and Plato placed her in the dialogue because every reader of his work was aware that Socrates himself did not create and promote a theory of ideas.

¹⁶ It is possible that the *erastes* and *eromenos* is the same person (*Smp.* 211b7–8), but it cannot indeed have a narcissistic dimension which Agathon presents in his speech.

¹⁷ For example, Cornford (1950: 79) states that a turn between “small” and “big mysteries” illustrates a transition from the real to the Platonic Socrates (see also Vlastos (1999: 152, footnote 58) and de Luise 2014). The interesting interpretation of Socrates as the atopic figure offers Blondell (2006: 174–178).

¹⁸ It would mean that Diotima is also treated as a historical person; see e.g. Jan Swearingen 2005. It would also indicate—according to Scott & Wellton (2008: 248, footnote 65)—that either (1) Diotima’s teaching does not concern the object called an idea or (2) her speech in the *Symposium* is the earliest evidence about Plato’s (?) metaphysics. See also Halperin 1990: 119–124.

¹⁹ Plato, *Ap.* 29e1–3; 30b2; *Phd.* 100a3. Socrates’ activity is related to the souls of both the young and older persons, but it seems in principle that he cares, for the most part, the latter; see Plato, *Ap.* 23c; 33a–b.

This interpretation, however, is subject to several doubts. As far as beginning the path to beauty itself is concerned, nothing is mentioned in Plato's ancient biographies—although they are not biographies in the modern sense—about his children, which is significant in the case of such a famous and highly regarded person (Boas 1945). It can be argued, however, that the beginning of the path to beauty is not necessarily connected with begetting of children, but it starts appropriately together with a fascination with the male.²⁰ Nevertheless, it would be hard to understand how a human desire for immortality would be carried out then. Despite this objection, the further course is easy to explain: Plato's meeting with Socrates and participation in the discussions stimulated an enchantment by the human actions,²¹ and an encounter with the Pythagoreans inspired an approach to knowledge (a science). Because both biographical explanations seem to be unsatisfactory, the third possibility should be taken into consideration. It is entirely possible that Diotima's character in *Symposium* is Plato's construction and that her philosophical beliefs should be considered in themselves.

It seems that although the path to beauty can be followed both alone and with someone else, the erotic agitation associated with beauty is an inherent trait. What is interesting is that neither independently climbing the ladder of knowledge step by step, nor climbing it with someone who is a moral authority (in the *erastēs-eromenos* relationship), guarantees achieving the goal. This is how Diotima determines the possibility of Socrates' being initiated to the highest level:

ta telea kai eoptika, hōn heneka kai tauta estin, ean tis orthōs metiēi, ouk oid' ei hoios t'an eiēs (*Smp.* 210a1–2).

Why there is no guarantee and whence came doubts? If the verb "*metiēmī*" is understood in this sentence as "to follow *erastēs*"—someone concrete who is a tangible moral model, then it would be in order to satisfy something that is somewhat changeable (as Diotima says at the beginning of her speech). A temporal aspect of the relationship cannot be also long-lasting—a death of *erastēs* can be caused by an age difference between *erastēs* and *eromenos* for example.²² It is probable, however, that a specific *type* (*pattern*) of behaviour should be seen in the conduct of *erastēs* and this type (*pattern*) ought to be remembered, internalized and repeated until someone gains a full knowledge. It should be also noticed that Diotima uses here an indefinite pronoun as the subject and the subjunctive form of a verb as

²⁰ Biographizing and bordering on the so-called "intentional fallacy," Dover (1978: 12) says about Plato (pursuant to *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*): "An Athenian aristocrat, he moved in a section of society which certainly regarded strong homosexual desire and emotion as normal [...]. Plato's philosophical treatment of homosexual love may have been an outcome of this ambience. We must, however, leave open the possibility that his own homosexual emotion was abnormally intense and his heterosexual response abnormally deficient. He may, therefore, present a somewhat exaggerated picture of the homosexual orientation of his own time, place and class."

²¹ It is possible that the meeting with Socrates was probably the cause that Plato has burnt his poetic works. It would confirm (in accordance with the evidence in the *Symposium*) that he would like to achieve immortal fame also in this field of a literary output; see Diogenes Laertius III 5; Olympiodorus, *in Alc.* II 76–78; Anonymus, *Prolegomena philosophiae platonicae* 2.11.

²² A representative relationship between Plato and Socrates lasted eight years, assuming that they first met the second when he was twenty (Diogenes Laertius III 5).

the predicate. The first item shows that the subject could be a man or a woman, and the use of the subjunctive shows an eventuality of the described situation, i.e., she is uncertain of fulfilment but considers it to be likely. The priestess' statement may indicate that she did not herself experience this episode, and her story could then be understood as a pure hypothesis. Diotima, however, expresses not only some doubts about the possibility of a full initiation itself, but she is even more doubtful about Socrates' capability to do it. Why does she impugn his capability? There could be several answers. It is possible she does not know Socrates well—how he has lived and who he now is. She cannot be in an *erastēs-eromenos* relationship, or even share a sexual affinity with him. If the priestess tells Socrates only a theoretical story and he follows *only* her words without *erastēs'* moral supporting, it is quite possible that he will not reach the goal. But even if someone knows the theory and possesses a moral model, this would not secure success in his or her life. This is so presumably for two reasons. In the first place, an approval of Diotima's teaching is based on faith, trust and belief [*pistis*]. Everyone who philosophizes must be governed by a belief that is created by reason in the form of the *orthē doxa*, which is an effect of the human's friendship and love for reason.²³ One could hazard a guess that a level of belief remains even when someone achieves knowledge [*epistēmē*, *mathēma*] about beauty, and that it does not turn into certainty until beauty itself is suddenly revealed. In the second place, even if someone maintains contact with a concrete moral model (or he or she structures the model pursuant to literary examples for instance), it would not assure that the subject will act according to this ideal. It is so because of an *erōs*—an internal power thanks to which a human being has a chance to philosophize among other things. Being faced with beauty, this might bring on a state of *ekplēksis*, which may have both a positive and negative dimension. In the first case, an *erōs* creates such commotions in a human being's life that he or she is ready to renounce the majority of their needs to dedicate one's self solely to a contemplation of love's object. In the second case, it produces immense arousal and a desire to dominate and to consume the object of love (*Smp.* 211d3–8). This is why a dedication to contemplation, to philosophy consists in actually (not ostensibly²⁴) developing the fundamental personality trait which is *sōphrosunē*, i.e., self-control, self-restraint.

What is then the meaning of Socrates' words that he practices the erotic things in different ways? A theoretical model is as follows: every person has an inner power called *erōs* which enables him or her to see beauty in various areas of their life. This power, however, should be channelled not only to perceive sensual beauty (although this seems to be the first and necessary step in the development of love) but, above all, to discern the other, non-sensual beauty. However, it should also be remembered that the ultimate power of love has to be controlled, and when someone can do it with regard to beauty in other people and his or her actions, the main quality is justice, and when it is in reference to themselves, this is called self-restraint. Someone who has both virtues is in possession of prudence [*phronēsis*], and when he or she is

²³ See also Plato, *Phdr.* 240e–241a; Xenophon, *Smp.* VIII 18.

²⁴ Plato tells about the ostensible self-restraint in the *Phaedo* (*Phd.* 68c–69a). It appears as the effect of the profit and loss account made in reference to the material things. A man gets under control a desire of one or more things to gain another which seems to be better than the rejected one.

initiated into the highest level, he or she becomes wise [*sophoi*]. Plato's *Symposium* offers not only a conceptual guide to a beautiful life, but it also delivers a virtual and ideal model of *erastēs*. Naturally, this model is Socrates. He takes a critical attitude towards his own and others ideas, and at the same time is ready to trust someone who is wise. The guide and the model function as an invitation to philosophy, without a guarantee that insight into ultimate reality will be gained.

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