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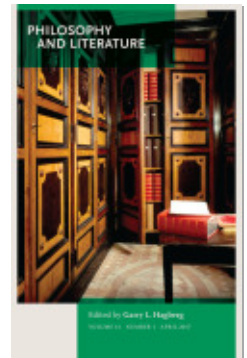
## The First Trial of Socrates

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## THE FIRST TRIAL OF SOCRATES<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** Prefiguring the *Apology* trial, Alcibiades accuses Socrates of hiding something godlike within himself. The other speechmakers are jurors for this impromptu trial. At the end they are merely amused by Alcibiades's rantings as a spurned lover. But is Alcibiades right that Socrates is, based on Diotima's teachings, like love represented by Eros, a messenger between the gods and humans? And, based on the common theme in the love speeches that love involves an exchange, does Socrates owe Diotima something for her instructions? As a self-proclaimed practitioner of her elevating love, does he indeed enact it? Is he guilty of hubris?

### I

**B**EFORE THE *APOLOGY* TRIAL by five hundred of his fellow Athenians, Socrates is put on trial by a close associate, Alcibiades, in the *Symposium*. The first trial prefigures or echoes the second, famous one. The speeches on love that precede the entrance of Alcibiades, especially Socrates's speech—in which he discloses instructions on love given to him by Diotima—is the basis on which Socrates should be judged. Because the jury for this trial does not render a verdict, I assume the role of a juror. If I were a modern prospective juror, I might not pass *voir dire*, though, like Alcibiades, I have been a lover of Socrates, I have become disenchanted with him because I find no evidence that he examined his own life in the way he relentlessly examined others such as Euthyphro. So as jurors are wont to do, I may find that Socrates is not guilty of the manifest accusation but is seriously culpable in a different respect.

## II

After the last speech in praise of love by Socrates, Alcibiades enters the scene noisily, announcing he is very drunk. He intends to place a wreath on Agathon in honor of his victory as a playwright, only to discover that Alcibiades's previous lover, Socrates, is reclining in the privileged place next to Agathon. Alcibiades accuses Socrates of trapping him again and Socrates counters, appealing to Agathon for protection: "You can't imagine what it's like to be in love with him. . . . The fierceness of his passion terrifies me"<sup>2</sup> (213c-d). In reply Alcibiades threatens: "I promise you'll pay for this."<sup>3</sup> We learn from Alcibiades, as an eyewitness, that Socrates is as resolute and calm when faced with a seducer as he is when faced with an enemy in battle. So it is not plausible that Socrates is terrified by Alcibiades. He may be acting with comic irony. Or he may indeed fear certain kinds of strong passion.

Instead of giving a speech in praise of love as the others had, Alcibiades offers to give a speech in praise of Socrates. Socrates anticipates a sinister side to this proposal: "Are you going to praise me only in order to mock me?" (214e). If Alcibiades is indeed drunk and speaking with a double intention, to praise and mock, should we take seriously his portrayal of Socrates, the most extended characterization of him in all of Plato's dialogues? Even if he is sober in thought, should we take the word of a spurned lover? To validate the truthfulness of his claims, Alcibiades gives Socrates the opportunity to interrupt his speech if he hears anything he believes to be false. With one exception, Socrates never does.<sup>4</sup> Even if Alcibiades is not a credible witness-accuser, Socrates's own actions indict him as a lover, in the opinion of this juror.

In his speech Alcibiades does praise Socrates and, ironically, mocks himself rather than Socrates. This scene, portraying a lovers' quarrel, holds obvious comic aspects. Yet it has tragic aspects as well,<sup>5</sup> as Alcibiades proceeds to give an account of Socrates's "bizarreness" (215). Socrates, he says, is like a statue of Silenus, with a double aspect. On the outside, the statue represents a flute player; on the inside it contains tiny statues of the gods. Alcibiades elaborates: Socrates is like a satyr playing his flute, thereby "casting his spells on people." As a result, "we are all transported, completely possessed" (215c, 215d). He details how deeply Socrates's words upset him: "My very own soul started protesting my life" (215e). Alcibiades admits that Socrates makes it seem as if "my life isn't worth living" (216). Thus, he affirms Socrates's famous assertion in the *Apology*, "the unexamined life is not worth living." Furthermore,

Alcibiades feels shame. In the presence of Socrates he believes that he should change his life but, free of him, he goes back to his old ways, tragically so in light of his betrayals of Athens.

Alcibiades explains how Socrates focuses, most importantly, on what is inside a person as opposed to what is outside. Socrates is crazy about beautiful boys, yet “he cares little whether a person is beautiful, rich, or famous in any other way that most people admire”—“these possessions are beneath contempt”<sup>6</sup> (216e). Alcibiades is aware of what is inside Socrates: he testifies that he has seen the godlike figures Socrates keeps hidden inside himself. While Socrates’s arguments might seem ridiculous until “you go beyond their surface . . . they’re truly worthy of a god, bursting with virtues inside . . . of great—no, of the greatest—importance for anyone who wants to become a truly good man” (221c–222d). But instead of revealing the wisdom Socrates presumably holds, Alcibiades points out that Socrates’s public performance, indeed his whole life, is “one big game—a game of irony” (216e).

What is so valuable inside Socrates is a godlike knowledge of right values. Socrates interrupts Alcibiades (the only time he does) to deny that he has the powers to make a man better. Is Socrates being coy in denying he has this power? He does not make his usual, stronger denial that he knows that he does not know what is integral to living wisely. Socrates may be assuming that in teaching virtue, the student has the power to effect change, not the teacher. This interpretation would be odd, since Socrates claims that Diotima taught him the art of love. He protests: If he does have the power to make a man better—neither affirming nor denying that he does—is the “merest appearance of beauty” (218e) a fair exchange for this power? A similar question could be posed to Socrates: was it a fair exchange for Diotima to instruct him for his mere appearance of understanding love?

Alcibiades details how he attempted to seduce Socrates but failed, even when he shifted positions from being the passive, expectant younger beloved to being the active, older lover. Nothing happened when he was under the covers with Socrates for the whole night—a painful source of humiliation for Alcibiades. Alcibiades then gives a firsthand account of Socrates’s conduct during two wars. One episode is curious. In support of Socrates’s “bizarreness”—both a compliment and an accusation—Alcibiades describes how Socrates stood trancelike throughout a cold night engaged in thought and, when the sun came up, went about his usual morning rituals. The other soldiers, witnessing Socrates in the cold wearing only a cloak and in bare feet, looked at

him as if “he was doing it to spite them”<sup>7</sup> (220c). Alcibiades finishes his speech by declaring that Socrates is “unique”: He is “so bizarre, his ways and his ideas are so unusual” (221d) that no human exists to whom one can compare him; the closest comparison is Silenus, inside of whom are godlike representations. But Alcibiades cautions Agathon—and presumably anyone whom Socrates approaches—that Socrates will deceive you as he presents himself as your lover. Thus ending, his speech “provoked a lot of laughter, because of its frankness” (222c); and it is obvious to those present that Alcibiades is still in love with Socrates.

### III

Why call Alcibiades’s confession a trial? His unrequited love of Socrates certainly seems like a trial to him.<sup>8</sup> He laments his misery as a spurned lover; he can’t live with Socrates or without him.<sup>9</sup> But Alcibiades explicitly states that he is conducting a trial of Socrates. And the men present constitute the jury: “members of the jury—for this is really what you are: you’re here to sit in judgment of Socrates’s amazing arrogance and pride” (219c). No one protests the role Alcibiades has cast for them. No one protests the charge against Socrates.<sup>10</sup> In Alcibiades’s trial, Socrates does not display any obvious arrogance or pride. He is, during most of it, silent. What evidence does Alcibiades offer to support his charge of arrogance and pride? He alleges that Socrates is more than he seems, hence deceptive. His arguments and ideas corrupt the listener who sees beyond their apparent foolishness.<sup>11</sup> Socrates corrupts by leading earnest listeners away from traditional Athenian values of honor, beauty, and wealth.

Alcibiades reports that he had a similar experience, resulting in a conflict between his usual way of living and the one he experienced in the presence of Socrates. Socrates offered him a different set of values, the virtues of the (philosophically transformed) virtuous man. It is important to note the guise in which Socrates offers his view of the virtuous life: as a godlike being on the inside. At least that is how Alcibiades views Socrates. Socrates does not claim to be a Silenus figure with godlike virtues inside himself. But he does not deny it either, except to state that he is not a teacher of virtue. Furthermore, he does not deny his power to spellbind others, the effect of which is to appear powerful while offering a radically new, nontraditional view of virtue. Alcibiades believes that Socrates is teaching him how to live a better life, a life different from the one Alcibiades has been living, so proud of his beauty, power, and high Athenian status.

What evidence might support Alcibiades's accusation that Socrates is a deceptive lover? To answer this question we need to see how the basic structure of love is developed by each speaker's praise of love. Phaedrus, the first speaker, asserts the customary rhetoric for the kind of love they are praising, a love involving give-and-take between an older and a younger man. Instruction in how to live well is exchanged for some kind of sexual favor. Phaedrus also assumes that the older man is above the younger man in status. As will become apparent, love for all the speakers, including Socrates, is asymmetrical in two ways. There is a difference in the status of the two lovers. In the first speeches, love is between an older man and a younger boy. As the speeches progress, love shifts from bodies to souls, from humans to gods, from mortality to immortality, and from particular to universal, each involving a difference in status. Also there is an asymmetry in what is exchanged. Part of the common structure in all the speeches is that love has power. According to Phaedrus, if love is honorable, the lovers gain pride and strength in each other's eyes. So, Phaedrus claims, lovers have exceptional courage in battle because a lover would not want to be seen as cowardly in the eyes of his beloved. He adds that lovers who lack honor will suffer shame. In summary, the love speeches involve an asymmetrical exchange between two unequal parties, and if the love is conducted honorably, power of some kind emerges.

Pausanias, the next speechmaker, continues the theme of shame and honor as he elaborates on the difference between heavenly love and common love (heavenly obviously is more valuable). Alcibiades's love of Socrates, as he describes it, seems common insofar as he emphasizes his frustration over not gaining a lover's sexual satisfaction. When he is under the cloak with Socrates, he is more concerned with bodies than souls, including his own body, which he vainly believes is beautiful—certainly beautiful enough to attract and hold Socrates. He also is more committed to political power and customary status than the more valuable soul ideals. While Socrates avoids common love with Alcibiades, it is not evident that he practices heavenly love, as construed by Pausanias.

Ignoring the ponderous speech of Eryximachus, Aristophanes makes a significant change in the basic, asymmetric symposium-love structure: from a relation between older men and younger boys to one between gods and humans. Aristophanes gives an account of three phases in human nature. Though his account is difficult to visualize, he describes original humans as being round with four legs, four arms, and two heads. In punishment for their arrogant assault on the realm of the gods, Zeus

cut each one in half. Because they languished in this second stage, and so presumably did their offerings to the gods, Zeus made another change, turning their genitals to the front to enhance reproduction. In the last stage, love is motivated by incompleteness, as each half searches for his or her original other half. When one finds his or her other half, the wound and humiliation of being split heals. Union with one's other half is so satisfying that lovers wish to be welded together. Aristophanes's genealogical story indicates a lack of power or status, which humans experience as a shameful wound, because, in their original form, they were arrogant and prideful in attempting to seize godlike status. So human love is shaded by shame.

This fanciful account of human nature does fit Alcibiades's condition. In confessing to loving Socrates, he experiences a painful wound from rejection, subsequent humiliation, and shame. His shame originates in his perception of Socrates, with whom he wishes to unite, as godlike. In the eyes of such a godlike lover, how could Alcibiades not feel shame for being unacceptable? Thus he finds himself suffering the absence of the person he believes is his other half. Insofar as he sees Socrates as godlike, he would need to ascend somehow, to be worthy of Socrates's love. Ascent is the direction of Diotima's teaching, the opposite of Aristophanes's human descent.

Significantly, in terms of Aristophanes's account of love, Socrates too is looking for his other half. His other half is not a person, as will become evident in the Diotima part of his love speech. Notice, Socrates does not seem to experience his lack as a shameful wound. Quite the opposite, he is not vulnerable to any suffering as a lover. Generalizing from Alcibiades's account of him as immune to cold and alcohol, Socrates does not suffer any of the usual bodily vulnerabilities. Unlike Aristophanes's humans, Socrates seems aloof and proud, even invulnerable, in his search for his soul half: wisdom. Diotima reveals to Socrates how the art of love overcomes incompleteness by undergoing higher and more abstract versions of beauty, to reach a profound experience of beauty as a purely idealized concept. Love is typically directed toward a particular, embodied person, except for Socrates who seeks an abstraction, the nature and embodiment of wisdom. This may account for Socrates's rejection of Alcibiades, the choicest of physical bodies. Who, if anyone, is worthy to ascend with Socrates as a lover? Once he takes the first step up the ladder of love, Socrates turns away from individual lovers.

In the next speech, Agathon demonstrates another change in the asymmetrical structure of the love relationship, from a particular good (below) to an all-encompassing good (above). After Agathon gives his speech elevating love to the sum of all good things, Socrates questions him, establishing that to seek something presumes that it is lacking.<sup>12</sup> Curiously, in agreeing with Aristophanes that humans are incomplete, Socrates does not appear to suffer any wound or humiliation from his lack of wisdom.<sup>13</sup> Diotima's instruction to Socrates contains another significant change in the symposium-love relationship. The asymmetry of older man above the younger boy is replaced with Diotima<sup>14</sup> as teacher-priestess (above) and Socrates as the student initiate (below).

In keeping with the basic symposium love structure, Diotima will guide Socrates in the art of love. Love, she teaches, is one of the spirits. Spirits are messengers, carrying prayers and sacrifices from humans to the gods and carrying commandments and gifts from the gods to humans. Love (Eros), Diotima explains, is the offspring of plenty and poverty and is neither immortal nor mortal. Eros is a combination of opposites, immortality and mortality, plenty and poverty, and other contraries. These opposites would be contradictory except that Eros, a schemer after the beautiful and good, has a cyclical nature like the seasons. Eros finds the good, always loses it, then comes back to life with the renewed task of finding the good again. Love lives and dies between immortal wisdom and mortal ignorance. In effect, Diotima plays the role of Eros, whose function is to take messages between gods and humans. Eros/Diotima creates a vision of immortality and plenty in the form of beauty for Socrates, who is mortal and impoverished insofar as he is lacking what is most important, wisdom.

While both Alcibiades and Socrates are seeking their own versions of their other half, a notable difference exists. Diotima introduces a distinction between body and soul. Accordingly, Alcibiades seeks a love directed to both body and soul, specifically the body and godlike soul of Socrates understood through the metaphor of Silenus. Socrates clearly rejects the body component in love. The body, according to Diotima, is a pollutant, preventing one from seeing the "beautiful itself, absolute, pure and unmixed" (211e). It follows that the body is a source of shame and humiliation. This partly explains why Socrates rejects Alcibiades; by being resolutely impassive to Alcibiades's bodily advances, he avoids physical pollution and, consequently, shame and humiliation. He is not interested in bodies, in spite of his apparent praise of and attraction to beautiful bodies. Beautiful bodies are, at best, the bottom rung of the ladder to beauty and wisdom.



What does Socrates give Diotima in exchange for her teaching? She has initiated him into the mystery of love, the culmination of which is a fecund, transcendent beauty, not the “merest appearance” of it. Since he does not exchange sexual favors for her instruction, it would seem that the appropriate exchange would be, at the very least, for Socrates to put her instruction into practice. He has this opportunity with Alcibiades. Independent of Alcibiades’s charges, is Socrates culpable for not understanding or acting on Diotima’s instruction? What power does Socrates obtain, as lovers do, from love? It seems his only power is to stay resolutely impassive to Alcibiades’s advances.

The “jury” laughs at the frankness of Alcibiades’s speech, because Alcibiades is obviously still in love with Socrates. Even though Alcibiades suffers from jealousy and unrequited love, the “jury” does not, in fact, respond to his accusations against Socrates. Accordingly, the “jury” either believes the accusations are far-fetched and even comical or they are obviously true but not serious. Socrates does not take the accusations seriously either. Alcibiades’s trial of Socrates appears to be a trial in absentia, since Socrates hardly seems present. He ignores or deflects Alcibiades’s accusation that he is godlike. When Alcibiades concludes his testimony, Socrates deflates it as just a ploy of a jealous lover trying to come between him and Agathon. Socrates deliberately exacerbates Alcibiades’s love wound when he invites Agathon to sit next to him, clearly distancing himself from Alcibiades—hardly an enactment of a higher vision of love. At the end of the dialogue, Socrates resumes his argumentative character as he tries to prove that authors should be able to write both comedy and tragedy.

#### IV

Unlike the “jury,” I take seriously Alcibiades’s accusations and Socrates’s failures. What might Socrates be guilty of? One accusation, his bizarreness, is obvious from Alcibiades’s description of him in the past. Just as he did when he was a soldier, Socrates gets lost in thought before he arrives at Agathon’s house. As the dialogue ends, Socrates is described as having the stamina to talk all night, to drink without getting drunk as the others presumably do, and then to get up as usual to go about his daily affairs without a hangover. So Socrates leaves the symposium as he entered, a solitary figure, capable of a singular power of thinking, undisturbed by human vulnerabilities even as he is the jealous love object of two illustrious men. His bizarre behaviors seem

harmless, not grounds for an accusation against him, except that he is the singular recipient of instruction from Diotima. He claims that she is wise in the art of love, the proof of which is that she had the power to put off a plague because she knew how Athenians could appease the gods (201d). In this instance, her love power resides in her awareness of the nature of those in need of healing and in her ability to extract a healing gift from the gods. Does Socrates as a practitioner of wisdom-love have such an awareness of others' need for healing? More significantly, is Socrates suggesting that he, like Diotima, can extract a gift from the gods to heal ignorance (presumably Socrates's view of the plague Athenians were suffering)?

Before I address the serious accusation of being godlike, I want to point out that Socrates is guilty of several failures. Consider how Alcibiades and Socrates stand as lovers, based on the speeches in the *Symposium*. A person can praise love in a speech and not match talk with action. Socrates praises, with false humility, Agathon's "amazing" speech. In spite of asserting that Agathon does not tell the truth, Socrates approves of one aspect of Agathon's speech: "One should first show the qualities of Love and only then those of his deeds" (199c). Consequently, we should expect that Socrates will show deeds of love after Diotima has shown him the qualities of love, if he indeed is a lover of wisdom, as he claims. But Socrates does not guide anyone in ascent to the form of beauty, which is at the core of Diotima's philosophy of beauty-wisdom. In her instruction, Diotima duplicates the action of Eros; she carries a message about pure divine-like beauty to Socrates, who should ascend as high as possible to behold this "sea of beauty." She makes clear the steps necessary to ascend to the highest beauty.

How far does Socrates ascend the ladder?<sup>15</sup> With respect to Alcibiades, Socrates seems to affirm the first step, that one must transcend the love of one particular, beautiful body. He indicates he has taken this step by being impassive to the seductive love of Alcibiades. But since he chooses Agathon as a potential lover, Socrates is still at the bottom step of the ladder. Perhaps he has only the more modest preliminary task: to clear away others' ignorance about love so they can begin their ascent to wisdom. However, we have no evidence for this interpretation.

Socrates argues that desire involves the lack of something important. Further, he discloses that he lacks, but desires, wisdom. In Aristophanes's terms, a desire for and lack of something essential to one's nature and well-being would be experienced as a wound, inducing shame and humiliation. Alcibiades, at the risk of ridicule, reveals his unrequited

love wound. Socrates does not reveal any wound or shame regarding his lack of wisdom. Socrates not only does not show any deeds of love, he fails to show any wisdom-lacking wound or to take any action to achieve wisdom. In his engagement with Alcibiades, Socrates fails to manifest any desire for wisdom. Ironically, Alcibiades does.

How grateful is Socrates for Diotima's instruction? Given the basic structure of love in the *Symposium*, the person in the "below" position owes something to the person "above" for the instruction on how to live well. Presumably, he gives Diotima nothing sexual. At the end of his speech, Socrates claims he is persuaded by Diotima's instruction on love. So he makes a commitment,

and once persuaded, I try to persuade others too that human nature can find no better workmate for acquiring this [true virtue] than Love. That's why I say that every man must honor Love, why I honor the rites of Love and *practice them* with special diligence, why I commend them to others. Now and always I praise the power and courage of Love far as I am able. (212b; emphasis added)

The closest Socrates comes to honoring such a commitment occurs in Alcibiades's account of his efforts to seduce an impassive Socrates. After his own speech, Socrates makes no effort to persuade, honor, or practice the ascent-love Diotima teaches. He fails to show any power of love. His sexual restraint with Alcibiades might suggest he acted honorably, in contrast to Alcibiades's dishonorable efforts at seduction. The only rite of love he manifests is jealousy, mock or real.

More serious than these failures is how he places himself in terms of the asymmetry of above and below. Diotima, like Aristophanes, obviously places the gods above and humans below. As a lover of wisdom Socrates resembles Eros, a go-between. He has received a message about wisdom from Diotima (and the Delphic Oracle) that establishes a life mission: to expose the Athenians' ignorance and rouse them to seek wisdom. Socrates acts as if he is superior to Athenian authorities. They are ignorant: ignorant that they lack wisdom, and thus ignorant even of the essential aspiration to seek it.

But is Socrates like Eros, being godlike? Alcibiades thinks so. He sees Socrates as a statue, satyr-like on the outside, casting a spell, and inside containing emblems of the divine. Alcibiades's split perception of Socrates—a lowly satyr with divinities within—resembles Diotima's characterization of Eros as midway between human and divine. Where does Socrates place himself in this divine/human division? As a lover

of wisdom, carrying messages between the gods and humans, he is like Eros, above humans and godlike.<sup>16</sup> Aristophanes's myth about arrogant human beings cut in half should stand as a caution for Socrates. Socrates, like the original humans, may be guilty of hubristic arrogance, thinking he can enter the realm of the gods or come as close to entering as any human can.

Whether Alcibiades sees Socrates accurately as godlike, having divinities within him, is less important than whether Socrates sees himself in this way. The evidence is mixed.

Socrates does not refute this characterization of him. Nor do the others protest this characterization. The "jury" may have viewed Alcibiades's accusation that Socrates is godlike as simply part of Socrates's bizarreness, or they may have ignored the seriousness of this claim because they are wholly affected by the comic nature of Alcibiades's confession. Yet, in his portrayal of Diotima, Socrates establishes the necessary steps of ascent, beyond the ordinary human realm, to a godlike apprehension of the awesome form of beauty.

In effect, love of beauty is a form of apotheosis for Socrates, an initiation into the divine. In his desire for wisdom, unlike others who claim wisdom, he acknowledges that he lacks but aspires to gain it. From listening to and absorbing Diotima's instruction, he may be partway up to the realm of transcendent beauty and the gods. His ascent is the opposite of Aristophanes's description of human descent into a body bearing the wound of shame and humiliation as a punishment for collective human hubris. Socrates's ascent—apparently singular and solitary—culminates in his entrance into the mystery of beauty itself. This looks like hubris if Socrates believes he has now attained a special godlike status above other humans. The charge of hubris might be mitigated if Socrates acknowledged that he was ignorant of how to live according to this mystery of beauty.

## V

In his aspiring, and perhaps successful, approach to the gods, Socrates is doubly guilty of excessive pride, of hubris. If Alcibiades's portrayal is accurate, Socrates presents himself as godlike, having divinities within him, and yet he withholds any godlike instruction or power from others, under the pretense of being ignorant. If he is not godlike, on what basis does he hold himself superior to others? He is competitive about whose speech is the best—and confident that his is. He is competitive

with Alcibiades over his love of Agathon, next to whom he is seated in the privileged place. Socrates likes to get the best of others and he seems to enjoy putting others down, especially in argumentation (e.g., he puts down Agathon by asserting Agathon's speech is beautiful [201c], but as Socrates reveals, Agathon contradicted himself). He puts down Alcibiades for his love for him. He provokes jealousy, even if he is not affected by this emotion. Socrates must think with pride that he is special because Diotima, a wise source<sup>17</sup> for love instruction, has chosen to teach him, not others—another instance of rivalry and besting others.

Alcibiades asserts that Socrates is so unique he cannot be compared with any other human. This compliment is also evidence of Alcibiades's accusation that Socrates displays jaw-dropping arrogance and pride. The source of his hubris is in aspiring to be godlike. Alcibiades does see Socrates as unique among—and above—humans in his godlike appearance. Socrates might claim that being godlike is what others attribute to him, not what he asserts about himself. Perhaps this is exonerating. But should we take him at his word?

Alcibiades alleges that Socrates is deceptive: "He has deceived us all: he presents himself as your lover, and before you know it, you're in love with him" (222b). Again, Socrates might claim to be godlike, while "deceitful lover" is how others describe him. But he neither denies these attributions nor takes responsibility for what role he might have in creating or sustaining them. His conviction that Athenians embrace contemptuous values speaks to his arrogance. Does Socrates's pride in his speech, in his power of attracting lovers and then resisting them, in his immunity to cold and war, add up to hubris? Any answer requires distinguishing what constitutes hubris among Socrates's associates and what constitutes hubris for us in a culture shaped by Christian humility. Insofar as he is committed to seeking wisdom, Socrates is arrogant by wholly ignoring Alcibiades's accusations, especially of being godlike. Even if he is not overly prideful, he is fraudulent, because he fails in his pledge to act on Diotima's instruction. Finally, he is ungrateful, giving nothing in exchange for his instruction how to love, presumably in the highest way.

## VI

I am inclined to find Socrates guilty of arrogance and pride as Alcibiades charged, though I hesitate. I am in a quandary similar to the one in which Alcibiades finds himself. I too have been spellbound by Socrates's philosophical discourse. I have seen what I believed were

philosophical divinities inside him. I see power in his questioning, and believe he loves wisdom. It is intoxicating to think that there are divine truths inside him. Socrates seems, therefore, to exemplify the rarest, most heroic, and most transformative practice of philosophy: to make us wiser and better. I confess to loving him—but no longer. His philosophical discourse is arrogant when it is destructive of others' beliefs. Practicing "the Socratic method" competitively on others is easy, with similar destructive results for them and congratulations for oneself. So, not based solely on his failures in the *Symposium*, I would convict him because he deceives himself and us if he thinks that he loves wisdom and applies it by living an examined life. On the other hand, I would exonerate him because it is treacherous to examine one's life<sup>18</sup>—an entirely different kind of trial. I would convict or exonerate myself for the same reasons.

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1. Robert Metcalf, in "The Trial of Socrates in Plato's *Symposium*" (*Epoche* 14 [fall 2009]: 39–55), offers a detailed review of current literature on the significance of Alcibiades's speech. He concentrates on Alcibiades's account of pathos, of Socrates's way of affecting him and others. This perspective shapes his view of Alcibiades's accusations that Socrates engages in deception and shows hubris. I agree for different reasons. Metcalf concludes provocatively that "we [as lovers of Socrates; in a way not unlike Alcibiades] undergo some of the very *pathe* that Alcibiades highlights in his pathology of associating with Socrates," thus explaining or justifying Socrates's bizarreness. "To live one's life so as to engage others erotically while playing games with them, making them feel shame at themselves, and such a deeply operating shame that they come to think that their lives are unlivable, yet responding to their emotional subjection with ironic disregard—how can one do this without becoming 'most strange'?" (49).
2. All references to the *Symposium* and *Apology* are from J. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997); hereafter cited by section.
3. In the *Apology* trial Socrates makes a similar threat: "I say, gentlemen, to those who voted to kill me, that vengeance will come upon you immediately after my death, a vengeance much harder to bear than that which you took in killing me" (39c). In both texts Plato gives the fullest characterization of Socrates as a person independent of his elenchus interrogations. In the *Apology* the character of Socrates emerges through his arguments and his strong, perhaps hubristic, reaction to the two verdicts of the jury. In the *Symposium* his character emerges through his actions manifesting love or not, again perhaps hubristically.

4. In the *Apology* trial Socrates is the sole speaker. In the *Symposium* trial he is silent for the most part. The punishments in the two trials are also extreme opposites, execution in one and, in the other, laughter directed at his accuser, Alcibiades.
5. It feels like a personal tragedy to experience love spurned. It was tragic for Athens that Alcibiades spurned and betrayed love for his home city. Socrates's failure—that he was not more effective in correcting Alcibiades's drive for self-glory—is in hindsight quite significant.
6. Because he rejects basic Athenian aspirations, it is no wonder that his *Apology* jurors reflect back his contempt of them in their verdict to execute him.
7. Like these soldiers, who witnessed a far different man than does Alcibiades, citizens at his *Apology* trial would not find it difficult to interpret Socrates's aloofness from customary matters, even contempt for them, as a spiteful rebuke.
8. Suppose Plato identified strongly with Alcibiades, suggested by my colleague John Carbonara. As a disappointed lover, Plato would have a motive for freeing himself from the spell of Socrates and his philosophical practice. This supposition has plausibility insofar as the *Symposium* represents a transition from Socrates as an interrogator of others to a Socrates who offers complex ideas (after book 1 in the *Republic*) on the nature of the soul, the ideal society, and a theory of Forms. (Beauty as a form is introduced in Diotima's speech.) Thrasymachus's criticisms of Socrates's way of interrogating others in book 1 would represent Plato's disenchantment with Socrates's elenchus.
9. Is, as Alcibiades asserts, Socrates's philosophical effectiveness limited to a godlike spell in Alcibiades's presence? If Socrates were a teacher of virtue, which he denies, his record of success would be notable because no one would become virtuous from his teachings. Sadly, his philosophical spell has little effect on his contemporaries to live an examined life. His "godlike spell" may have irritated the *Apology* jury more than substance of the charges.
10. The charge is hubris, not unlike the hubris Socrates displays at his *Apology* trial. Among the instances of hubris are Socrates accusing the Athenians of the very charges of which they accuse him, his dismissal of a penalty fine, and his alternative proposal that he should be honored with a place in the Prytaneum. His appeal to a divine source to justify his life's mission could easily be interpreted as arrogance. A juror could reasonably conclude that he was introducing a new god or god-sanctioned activity in his examination of Athenian wisdom. See George Hole, "Oedipus at the Trial of Socrates" (*Philosophy and Literature* 35, October 2011): 360–70.
11. The *Symposium* charges against Socrates are similar to those in the *Apology*. Alcibiades accuses Socrates of corruption, but not limited to the young. Alcibiades's view of Socrates as godlike resembles the *Apology* charge of creating of a new god, in this case himself.
12. When Socrates connects seeking something with lacking it, he makes a questionable inference. In seeing the beautiful, he concludes, the seeker not only lacks the beautiful, he is himself not beautiful. So the seeker, Socrates, lacks beauty in two ways. This conclusion is a leap on its own and is also suspect in terms of Aristophanes's myth: a lover who seeks his or her other half may be beautiful. Socrates is quick to establish that the seeker of beauty must himself be lacking in beauty, because he may be thinking of himself in

terms of wisdom, for which he is seeking. He recognizes its absence, not only for others but for himself. He may be alluding to his own lack of beauty.

13. Rather than suffer from his lack of wisdom, Socrates seems to elevate his lack of it into a virtue. He alone has divine confirmation of this virtue from the Oracle at Delphi. He is the wisest because he knows that he is ignorant, not wise, in the precise sense of knowing what he lacks.

14. In both the *Apology* and *Symposium* Socrates explains or justifies his life mission by reference to extraordinary female instructors.

15. Ruby Blondel argues that Socrates reached the highest rung of the ladder and, while listening to Alcibiades, embodies the Form of beauty. See Ruby Blondel, "Where Is Socrates on the 'Ladder of Love'?" in *Plato's "Symposium": Issues in Interpretation and Reception*, ed. J. H. Leshner, Debra Nails, and Frisbee C. C. Sheffield (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 147–78. In contrast, Martha Nussbaum states that Socrates only has unflattering qualities of a form, "hard, indivisible and cold" (Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986], p. 191). Both interpretations can be condensed in one lewd image of Socrates, like a man painted on wine pitchers and elsewhere, with a large erection. Accordingly, Socrates was a prick, always erect, proud of himself, though never willing to do the deed.

16. Alexander Nehamas sees strong connections between Diotima's account of love and Alcibiades's characterization of Socrates as a Silenus figure, which "offers a concrete image of Diotima's metaphor of the lover's being pregnant 'in body and soul.'" And, "Plato gives us in Socrates a union of lover and beloved, beguiler and beguiled . . . To love Socrates, as Alcibiades knows and makes clear to the company, is to love what Socrates, as Eros, loves: the possession of beauty, wisdom, and goodness. To love Socrates is to be a philosopher" (Alexander Nehamas, *Virtues of Authenticity: Essays on Plato and Socrates* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999], p. 313).

17. History might have been profoundly different for both Alcibiades and Socrates, as well as Athens, if they had become philosophical lovers, wise in both body and soul. Both ended their lives because of their apparent disloyalty to Athens. Alcibiades, the betrayer of Athens, was assassinated. Socrates, loyal to an oracle in opposition to Athenian aspirations, was executed.

18. Perhaps academic philosophers are prudent in ignoring Socrates's aspiration for wisdom and living an examined life.