Diotima (ca. 400 B.C.E.)

Diotima is known to us primarily through Plato's Symposium, in which Socrates recounts in dialogue form how she instructed him in the philosophical understanding of Eros, exposing the fallacies of his own youthful misconceptions about love and those of other speakers at the banquet. Diotima is described there and in other sources as a priestess of Mantinea and as a Pythagorean philosopher of the fifth century B.C.E., who lived for a time in Athens and was Socrates' teacher.

In the twentieth century the historical existence of Diotima has often been questioned, though earlier sources accepted that she was a historical person and no new evidence has been adduced. Classicist Robert C. Bury asserted flatly that "Diotima is a fictitious personage," but he offered no historical grounds for this conclusion. More recently, David M. Halperin has devoted a lengthy essay to the view that "Diotima's 'femininity' is illusory—a projection of male fantasy."

Mary Ellen Waithe (1987) and Susan Hawthorne (1994), however, argue persuasively on historical and internal textual grounds that there is good reason to accept the historical existence of Diotima as a real person, a philosopher whose ideas shaped those of Socrates and Plato. Andrea Nye (1994: 206–207) and Louis Ruprecht, Jr. (1992: 103–105) also call upon the history and cultural traditions of the Minoan past, and especially of Mantinea, to suggest the verisimilitude of Socrates having such a teacher and of Diotima having taught the ideas attributed to her by Plato.

The conception of Eros attributed to Diotima in the Symposium reappears in other dialogues of Plato, including the Republic, and has had profound and continuing influence on the history of political thought. At its core, it elevates love to a preeminent place in the soul and hence (as developed in the Republic) in the body politic. Viewed in this light, Diotima appears to carry forward the tradition of Sappho.

There is considerable debate today, however, as to the correct interpretation to be placed on Diotima's conception of love, or Eros. Some scholars maintain that Diotima rejects fleshly love in favor of the love of beauty and goodness, primarily the beauty and goodness of the creations of the mind. In this view, the argument which Plato portrays as the teaching of Diotima epitomizes a dualistic vision which separates the soul from the body, reason from emotion, and politics from compassion—subordinating the body, emotion, and compassion to the soul, reason, and state policy. With this conception of love, we may well understand Socrates' concluding comment, in the selection below: "And now and ever do I praise the energy and manliness of Eros with all the might I have" (emphasis added).

Other scholars, however, reject this view of Diotima's teaching. Christine Downing, for example, argues that Diotima's philosophy of love, set in the homoerotic ambience of Socrates and his male companions, emphasized relations of mutuality and offered a "feminine' dimension to male love" in the form of analogies to birthing; the creation or procreation of beauty and goodness. Susan Hawthorne, in "Diotima Speaks through the Body," argues that Diotima's language and metaphors offer a distinctively "feminine" vision (with caveats on this term). Hawthorne emphasizes the metaphors of pregnancy, birth, and connectedness in Diotima's ideas, linking them to later women philosophers such as Simone Weil and Luce Irigaray, and concludes that Diotima may be "the earliest named woman philosopher to 'think through the body,' or to 'write the body.'"

Martha Nussbaum, who views Diotima as fictional, portrays the ideas attributed to Diotima as simply those of Plato himself, emphasizing passages that direct the concepts of love and beauty toward abstraction, unity, purity, even uniformity, in a life of contemplation of truth (1986: 177–83). But others, such as Susan Hawthorne, have argued that Diotima raised challenges to Socrates' "absolutist dualistic divisions," questioning dualist oppositions between beauty and ugliness, good and evil, wisdom and ignorance. Andrea Nye also denies that Diotima's concept of love would lead to political quietism. On the contrary, Nye finds in Diotima a vision of love as creating community, generating the goods that lead to human happiness, and "continually foment the kind of change which breaks up the old and creates new knowledge and virtues" (Nye, 1990: 150).

These contrary interpretations reflect underlying changes and contradictions in ideas of masculinity, femininity, procreation, love, and so forth, from Diotima's time to the present. But they may also stem from internal contradictions in the text of the Symposium itself. Diotima's words are reported by Plato at fifth hand, through various tellings by Socrates and others who attended or heard of his account. It is reasonable to accept Plato's representation that Socrates regarded Diotima's teachings as important, that they dealt generally with the subject of Eros, and that Socrates credited Diotima with certain key philosophical ideas of his own. It is also likely that Plato, writing in the lifetime of some who were present at the gathering, would have tried to render a version of Diotima's views approximating Socrates' telling. But internal inconsistencies in the dialogue sug-
Diotima

gest that Plato sought to put his own ideas on bodyless love into the mouth of Diotima, the wise woman and priestess, "honoured of Zeus," while retaining at least a core of her actual teachings. It is thus a challenge to discern that core, and the dialogue between Diotima and Socrates remains an intriguing puzzle, open to ongoing speculation and debate.

The selection presented here is from Lane Cooper's 1938 translation of Plato's Symposium.

Sources and Suggested Readings


The Discourse on Eros

(FROM PLATO, THE SYMPOSIUM)

[Socrates and Diotima.] ... Now for the speech concerning Eros. It is one I heard from Diotima, a woman of Mantinea, who was wise on this and many another theme, and once, through sacrifice by the Athenians against the plague, she brought about a ten-years' respite from the sickness. And she it was who taught me on the theme of love. Accordingly, the speech that woman made to me I will attempt to give again to you, starting from the premises which Agathon and I agreed on; I will do it by myself, as well as I am able. The right procedure, Agathon, as you explained, is first to tell what Eros is, and what he is like, and then to tell of his works. I think the easiest way will be to follow through as she, the visitant, once did in answering me; for actually I said pretty much the same to her as Agathon just now said to me—that Eros was a mighty god, and was a thing of beauty; and she refuted me with just the arguments I used with him—that, by my reasoning, Eros was not beautiful, nor was he good. And I said: "How mean you, Diotima? You mean to say that Eros must be ugly and bad?" And she replied: "No blasphemy! Or do you hold that anything that is not beautiful must then perforce be ugly?" "Yes, certainly!" "And similarly that he who is not wise must of necessity be ignorant? Or are you not aware that there is something midway between ignorance and knowledge?" "What is that?" "Holding a correct opinion while yet unable to give a reason for it. Don't you know that this is neither understanding (for how could anything without a reason be called science?), nor is it ignorance (for when it tallies with reality, then how could it be nonsense?) Right opinion doubtless is some such thing as that, midway between intelligence and folly."

[Socrates.] That is true (said I).
[Diotima.] So you must not demand that that which is not beautiful must perforce be ugly, nor yet that that which is not good is evil. And so with Eros. When you personally admit that he is neither good nor beautiful, no more need you suppose that he is ugly and bad, but rather something intermediate (said she) between the two.

[Socrates and Diotima.] "And yet," said I, "it is agreed by all that he is a mighty god. "You mean, by all who do not know?" said she, "or by all who know as well?" "Absolutely all." At that she laughed, and said: "And how can that be, Socrates? How can it be admitted that he is a mighty god by those who hold that Eros is no god at all?" "And who are they?" said I. "You, for one," said she; "and I am one." And I rejoined: "What do you mean by that?" said I. "That is easy; tell me, now," said she, "do you not hold that all the gods are beautiful and happy? Or would you dare to say that any one of them is neither beautiful nor happy?" "By Heaven, not I!" said I. "But those whom you call happy, they are those who have the good and beautiful in their possession?" "Certainly." "But it is precisely Eros, you admitted, who, because he lacks the good and beautiful, desires these very things of which he stands in need." "I have admitted that." "How, then, could he be god, who is bereft of what is beautiful and good?" "In no way, it would seem." "So you see," said she, "that you yourself do not consider Eros god." "Well," said I, "and what is Eros, then? A mortal?" "Not at all. "But what, then?" "As in the previous cases, he is intermediate: between the mortal and immortal." "And so, what, Diotima?" "He is a mighty genius [daemon, spirit], Socrates, and hence, like all the race of spirits is midway between divine and mortal." "What function has it?" I inquired.

[Diotima.] It has for its office to interpret between gods and men, to fetch and carry to the gods from men, and to men from the gods—from the one side prayer and sacrifice, from the other their behests and recompense for worship; being central, it fills the gap between the two, and thus the universe is bound together in one whole. Through it proceeds all divination, together with the priestly art of such as are concerned with sacrifices, with initiations, with prophecy in general, and with magic. Divinity does not mingle with humanity; but through it is carried on the intercourse and converse of the gods with men, in waking hours as well as sleep. And he who is wise in matters of the sort is a spiritual man [daemonios]; but he who is wise in any other matter, about arts or handicrafts, is but an artisan. Now these spirits [daemons] are many and diverse; and one of them is Eros.

[Socrates.] What about his father and his mother (I demanded). Who are they?

[Diotima.] The story is a rather long one (she replied), but I will tell you all the same. When Aphrodite was born, you see, that day the gods had a feast, and among the company was Plenty, son of Metis. When they had finished dinner, along came Poverty to beg, there being ample cheer, and hung about the door. Well, Plenty had got tipsy on the nectar (for wine did not yet exist), and went into the garden of Zeus, and sank down and went to sleep. So Poverty by reason of her want made a scheme to get herself with child by Plenty, and lay down beside him, and got Eros. And that is why Eros follows Aphrodite, and is her attendant: because he was begotten at her birthday festival, and is also by his nature a lover of the beautiful, and since Aphrodite is a lovely goddess.

Inasmuch, then, as he is the son of Plenty and Poverty, the state of Eros' fortune is like this. In the first place, he is for ever poor, and anything but delicate and beautiful, as the many think; no, he is rough, unkempt, unshod, and homeless, ever couching on the ground uncovered, sleeping beneath the open sky by doors and in the streets, because he has the nature of his mother, and is the constant mate of indigence. But again, in keeping with his father, he has designs upon the beautiful and good, for he is bold, headlong, and intense, a mighty hunter, always weaving some device or other, eager in invention and resourceful, searching after wisdom all through life, terrible as a magician, sorcerer, and sophist. Further, in his nature he is not immortal, nor yet mortal. No, on a given day, now he flourishes and lives, when things go well with him, and again he dies, but through the nature of his sire revives again. Yet his gain for ever slips away from him, so that Eros never is without resources, nor is ever rich.

As for ignorance and knowledge, here again he is midway between them. The case stands thus. No god seeks after wisdom, or wishes to grow wise (for he already is so), no more than anybody else seeks after wisdom if he has it. Nor, again, do ignorant folk seek after wisdom or long to grow wise; for here is just the trouble about ignorance, that what is neither beautiful and good, nor yet intelligent, to itself seems good enough. Accordingly, the man who does not think himself in need has no desire for what he does not think himself in need of.

[Socrates.] The seekers after knowledge, Diotima! If they are not the wise, nor yet the ignorant (said I), who are they, then?

[Diotima.] The point (said she) is obvious even to a child, that they are persons intermediate between these two, and that Eros is among them; for wisdom falls within the class of the most beautiful, while Eros is an eros for the beautiful. And hence it follows neces-
sarily that Eros is a seeker after wisdom [a philosopher], and, being a philosopher, is midway between wise and ignorant. And the cause thereof in him lies in his birth, his father being wise and gifted, his mother lacking wisdom and ability. So there, dear Socrates, you have the nature of the spirit [daimon]. There is nothing strange about your taking Eros to be what you thought him. Judging by the evidence of what you say, I think that you took Eros for the object of desire, and not that which desires. That is why to you, I fancy, Eros appeared to be all beautiful. And indeed the lovable is that which in reality is beautiful, tender, perfect, and accounted blest; whereas desiring has another form, a nature such as I explained.

[Socrates and Diotima.] And I said: “So be it, stranger-friend, for you speak well. Yet if Eros is like that, what value has he for mankind?” “That is the next thing, Socrates,” said she, “that I will try to show you. Eros is like that, and his origin was such; just so. And, as you say, he loves the beautiful. Now suppose that some one were to ask us: ‘What actually is the love of beauty, Socrates and Diotima?’ Or, to make it clearer, thus: ‘He loves who is enamoured of the beautiful; what is it he desires?’” And I answered: “That the object may be his.” “But the answer,” said she, “demands a further question, namely: ‘What happens to the man when the beauty becomes his?’” I replied that, for this question, I by no means had an answer ready.

“But suppose,” said she, “that one made a substitution, using ‘good’ instead of ‘beautiful’, and inquired: ‘Come, Socrates, he loves who is enamoured of the good; what is it he desires?’” “That the good,” said I, “may be his.” “And what happens to the man when the good things become his?” “On this,” said I, “I am more ready with an answer: that he will be happy.” “It is, in fact, by the possession of good things,” she said, “that the happy man is happy, and there is no need of asking, further, about what he wishes to be happy when he wishes it. No, the question seems to have attained its final answer.” “You are right,” said I.

“Now this wish and eros, do you think that they are common to mankind, and that everybody wishes that the good shall be for ever theirs? Or would you put it otherwise?” “No, thus,” said I—“that they are common to mankind.” “Well then, why is it, Socrates,” said she, “that we do not say that everybody is in love, if it be true that all are eager for the same things, and eternally? Why do we say, instead, that some love, and that some do not?” “I too,” said I, “am wondering at that.” “You need not wonder,” said she; “for we begin by separating off a certain kind of love, to which, applying the inclusive term, we give the name of ‘Eros’, while for the other species we use other names.” “For instance, what?” said I. “For instance, this. You are aware that poiesis [creation, poetry] is a term of wide extent. Thus, in every case, when anything whatever passes from not-being into being, the cause is poiesis. And hence the works produced by all the arts are acts of poiesis, and all the makers of them, poets.” “You are right.” “But nevertheless,” said she, “you know that they are not called poets, but go by other names. But from poetry as a whole one section is marked off, the part concerned with music and with metre, and gets the designation of the whole; this part alone it is that is called ‘poetry,’ and only they who share this realm of poetry are known as ‘poets.’” “You are right,” said I. “Well then, it is just the same with Love. The universal concept is all the longer for the good, and to be happy:

The all-inclusive and the subtle Love in every heart.

Some, however, though in numerous other ways they are concerned therewith, whether in pecuniary thrift, or in pursuit of the gymnastic art, or in philosophy, are not spoken of as ‘loving,’ nor called ‘lovers’; whereas others, following one special form of love, and eager in it, monopolize the general term, ‘love,’ ‘loving,’ ‘lovers.’” “I dare say you are right,” said I. “There is a theory, too,” said she, “that it is they that seek their other half who love. My theory asserts that love is neither of the half nor of the whole, unless, my friend, the object happens somehow to be good; since men are willing actually to have their feet and hands cut off, if they think their own members offend them. It is not to his own, methinks, that each one cleaves, unless some one calls the good his proper nature and his own, and the evil alien to him; so true is it that there is nothing that men love except the good. Do you think otherwise of them?” “By Heaven! not I,” said I. “Well then,” said she, “may one thus simply say that men love what is good?” “Yes,” I replied. “But what! Must one not add,” said she, “that they desire besides to have possession of the good?” “That must be added.” “And,” said she, “not only the possession, but to possess the good for ever?” “This also must be added.” “Accordingly,” said she, “all put together, Eros is the longing that the good shall be one’s own for ever.” “Your statement is most eminently true,” said I.

“Granted that love is always this,” said she, “by what manner of pursuit and in what activity does the eagerness and straining for the object get the name of Eros? What may this action really be? Can you say?” “If I could do so, Diotima, I should not,” said I, “be in amazement at your wisdom, or come to school to you for information on these very matters.” “In that case, I,” said she, “will teach you. This action is engendering in beauty, with relation both to body and to soul.” “One needs,” said I, “the power of divination in order to get your meaning, and I do not understand.” “Come,” she
answered, "I will speak more plainly. All human beings, Socrates," she said, "are fecund, fecund both in body and in soul; and when they reach a certain age, our nature yearns to generate. But generate in ugliness it cannot; it must generate in beauty. The union of a man and a woman, in fact, a generation; this is a thing divine; in a living creature that is mortal, it is an element of immortality, this fecundity and generation. But these things cannot occur in what is inharmonious; and the ugly is out of harmony with all that is divine, whereas beauty is harmonious with it. Therefore Beauty is the Moira and the Ilithyia [goddess of parturition] presiding over genesis. That is why the fecund, whenever it comes near a thing of beauty, becomes tranquil, expands with joy, and begets and generates. But when it draws near to the ugly, the fecund is depressed, in affliction shrouds itself, turns away, and shrivels up, and does not generate, but with pain endures the load of its fecundity. And hence there comes to the fecund, ripe and already swelling, the mighty transport over the beautiful, because possessing it frees the possessor from the cruel pain; for, Socrates," she said, "the aim of love is not the beautiful, as you suppose." "But, what, then, is it?" "It is generating and producing in the beautiful." "Let it be that," said I. "Yes, absolutely," she replied; "yet why precisely generation? Because, so far as may be to a mortal, generation is perpetual existence and eternal life. The bond between desiring immortality and the good arises necessarily from the premises, if it be true that eros means desire to have the good oneself for ever."

All this she taught me on the various occasions when she made discourse of love; and once she asked: "What do you imagine, Socrates, to be the cause of this desire and longing? Do you not mark how powerfully all the animals are affected when they desire to procreate, they that walk and they that fly, all frantic, and all amorously disposed, first for commerce, and then for the rearing of the progeny; and prepared to fight for these, the weakest even with the strongest, and to die for them, racking themselves with hunger, doing everything, in order that the offspring may be adequately nourished? With men," said she, "one might imagine that they acted thus from reason, but, in the beasts, what is the cause of this passionate behavior? Can you say?" And I said once more that I did not know. But she rejoined: "And so you think you will be competent some day upon the theme of love, when you are not aware of this?" "But, Diotima, there you have the very reason, as I just now said, why I come to you; it is because I know that I have need of masters. Do you, rather, tell me what the cause is of the things you mention, and of the other matters touching love."

"Well now," said she, "if you are convinced that the aim of love is by nature what we repeatedly have admitted it to be, you need not be astonished; for here the line of reasoning is the same as it was before: the mortal nature seeks, as far as it is able, to perpetuate itself and be immortal. But it can do only by this means of generation, because thus it always leaves behind another individual, a new one, to replace the old. In proof of that, take what they call the lifetime of the individual creature and its identity; the fact, for instance, that one is said to be the same from childhood till old age comes on. This person is, in truth, still called the same, although he never has the same materials in him, but, on the contrary, is ever being formed anew, with certain losses, alike in hair, flesh, bones, and blood—in his body as a whole."

"And that is true not merely of the body, but also of the soul; true of our ways, our character, our notions, longings, pleasures, pains, and fears; not one of these remains the same in any individual, but some of them are being born while others are passing away. Yet a change that is odder by far than that takes place in our knowledge; for not only do some parts of it come to be while others are lost, so that we never remain the same with respect to the things we know, but even the single piece of knowledge has this very lot. Thus the act called ‘recolλection’ implies that knowledge has departed; forgetting is, in fact, a departing of knowledge, and recollecting again is implanting a newborn memory in place of that which is leaving, thereby preserving knowledge, so that it seems to be the same. This is the fashion in which everything mortal is preserved, not in being always perfectly identical, as is divinity, but in that the disappearing and decaying object leaves behind it another new one such as it was. By this arrangement, Socrates," she said, "the mortal partakes of immortality, both in body and all else; the immortal does so in another way. So do not marvel if everything by nature preserves its own offspring; it is for the sake of immortality that every being has this urgency and love."

As for me, when I had listened to her words, I was amazed, and said: "Come, wisest Diotima, is that the way things really are?" said I. And she, replying like a finished Sophist:

[Diotima.] Socrates (said she), you may rest assured of it; and, for proof, only look, if you will, at men’s ambition. You would marvel at their want of reason, if you did not keep in mind what I have said, when reflecting on the vehemence with which they are disposed by love to win a name,

And to lay up for endless time imperishable glory. And for this they are prepared to encounter every peril, even more than for their children, to pour out all

their money, to submit to any toils whatever, and to die for it. Because (said she), do you imagine that Alcestis would have died for Admetus, or that Achilles would have followed Patroclus in death, or that your Codrus would have perished in advance for the kingdom of his children, if they had not supposed that there would be the deathless memory of them, for their virtue, which we now possess? Far from it (said she). No, methinks they all do all they can for an eternity of virtue and for glorious renown like that, and the better men they are, the more they do it. The reason is that they love immortality.

Well then (said she), when men’s fecundity is of the body, they turn rather to the women, and the fashion of their love is this: through begetting children to provide themselves with immortality, renown, and happiness, as they imagine—

Securing them for all time to come.

But when fecundity is of the soul—for indeed there are (said she) those persons who are fecund in their souls, even more than in their bodies, fecund in what it is the function of the soul to conceive and also to bring forth—what is this proper offspring? It is wisdom, along with every other spiritual value. Of these, the poets, all of them, are generators, and, among the artists, as many are called “original.” By far the greatest and most beautiful form of wisdom (said she) is that which has to do with regulating states and households, and has the name, no doubt, of “temperance” and “justice.” Now, when a person from his youth bears the germ of these within his soul, a godlike person, and with the coming of maturity desires to generate and procreate, he goes about, he too, in quest of the beauty in which he may beget, for never will he do it in deformity. And hence in his fecundity he is more drawn to bodies that are beautiful than to ugly ones; and if in one of them he meets a soul that is beautiful, high-minded, and well-born, he is powerfully attracted to this union of the two, and in the presence of this man he straightway becomes ready in discourse on virtue, and on the sort of things the good man ought to be concerned with, and be doing, and sets out to teach him. At the touch, methinks, of beauty, and in communion with it, he begets what he has long been fecund with, and brings it forth; present or absent, he has in mind the lovely being, and rears the progeny in common with that being, and thus such persons are united by a bond far closer than the tie through children, and continue in a firmer mutual affection, because their common offspring are more beautiful and deathless. Further, every one would rather have such children born to him than human offspring and, when he considers Homer, Hesiod, and the other able poets, he is envious of such posterity as they have left behind them, a posterity that confers on them immortal fame and memory, being itself immortal; such offspring, if you will (said she), as Lycurgus left behind in Lacedaemon, [the laws] which were the saviors of Lacedaemon, and, we may say, of Greece. With you [Athenians] Solon, too, has honor for the engendering of laws; as other men in many another place, alike among the Greeks and the barbarians, have brought many a noble work to light, engendering every kind of worth; for whom there have been, also, many shrines erected because of offspring of the sort, but never a shrine for any one because of human offspring.

The mysteries of love so far, I take it, Socrates, are such as even you may enter. To the complete initiation and final revelation which are the goal of these, if one follows the proper way, I do not know if you are fitted to attain. I will proceed (said she); I will do my utmost to instruct you. Do you try to follow as much as in you lies.

He who pursues the proper road to this result (said she) must in youth begin to visit beautiful forms, and first, if he be led aright by him who leads, must love one single object [physical form of beauty], and thereof must engender fair discourses. Then, however, he must come to see that the beauty in a given object is brother to the beauty of the next one, and, if he must hunt for beauty in the visible form, what folly if he failed to judge that the beauty in all objects is single and the same! But when he reflects on that, he will abate his violent love of one, disallowing this and deeming it a trifle, and will become a lover of all fair objects. Thereafter he must recognize that beauty in the soul is of a higher worth than beauty in the body [physical object], until, if perchance a person with a gentle soul should have but little comeliness of body, he is content to love that person, and to care for him, and to engender and discover such discourses as will improve the young. And thus, in turn, he will be forced to view the beauty in the pursuits of life, and in the law, and to see that it is all one self-consistent genus, till he takes the beauty of the body for a trifle. After occupations, he must needs be led to forms of knowledge, to behold, in turn, the beauty of the sciences, and, gazing at the realm, now vast, of beauty, no longer will he, like a menial, cleave to the individual form, to the beauty of a stripling or some man, or of some one pursuit, living in a wretched slavery and talking tattle; no, turned about towards the vast sea of beauty, and contemplating it, he will give birth to manifold and beautiful discourse of lofty import, and concepts born in boundless love of wisdom; till there, with powers implanted and augmented, he has the vision of one single science, the science of that beauty I go on to.

Try with all your might (continued she) to give
your mind to what I say. He who has been instructed thus far in the things of love, and who has come to see the beautiful in successive stages and in order due, when now he hears the goal of the initiation, will suddenly behold a beauty of wondrous nature, and, Socrates, this is that for which all the former labors were undertaken; a beauty, first of all, which is eternal, not growing up or perishing, increasing or decreasing; secondly, not beautiful in one point and ugly in another, not sometimes beautiful and sometimes not, nor beautiful in one relation and ugly in another, nor beautiful in this place and ugly in that, as if beautiful to some, to others ugly; again, this beauty will not be revealed to him in the semblance of a face, or hands, or any other element of the body, nor in any form of speech or knowledge, nor yet as if it appertained to any other being, a creature, for example, upon earth, or in the sky, or elsewhere; no, it will be seen as beauty in and for itself, consistent with itself in uniformity for ever, whereas all other beauties share it in such fashion that, while they are ever born and perish, that eternal beauty, never waxing, never waning, never is impaired. Now when a man, beginning with these transitory beauties, and through the rightful love of youths ascending, comes to have a sight of that eternal beauty, he is not far short of the goal. This is indeed the rightful way of going, or of being guided by another, to the things of love: starting from these transitory beauties, with that beauty yonder as a goal, ever to mount upwards, using these as rungs, from one going on to two, and from two to all fair bodies, and from beautiful bodies to beautiful pursuits, and from beautiful pursuits to beautiful domains of science, until, mounting from the sciences, he finally attains to yonder science which has no other object save eternal beauty in itself, and knows at last the beauty absolute.

There you have the life, dear Socrates (said the visitant from Mantinea), there if anywhere the life that is worth living by a man, in contemplation of the beauty absolute. If one day you behold it, it will not appear to you to be according to the measure of gold and raiment, or of lovely boys and striplings, at the sight of whom you now are entranced, and are ready, you along with many others, if you can gaze at your beloved and be for ever with them, to go (supposing it were somehow possible) without your food and drink, and only look at them and stay with them! What indeed (said she) do we think it would mean to a man to see the beauty absolute, authentic, pure, without alloy? Not beauty clogged with human flesh and hues and a vast deal of other mortal trumpery, but, instead, to be able to behold beauty divine in its own single nature? Do you believe (said she) that life can be ignoble for the man who looks up yonder, and with the rightful instrument beholds that beauty, and abides with it? Do you not conclude (said she) that then alone it will be his, when he sees the beautiful with that by which it can be seen, to bring to birth, not images of virtue, since what he holds to is no image, but real virtue, because he has laid hold on truth? And will it not be the lot of him who brings forth real virtue, and nourishes it, to be the friend of God, and to become, if it can come to any of mankind, immortal?

[Socrates.] There, Phaedrus and the rest of you, you have what Diotima said to me, and by it she convinced me. Once convinced, I labor to convince others also that, in order to attain this good, our human nature could not find a more efficient aid than Eros. And therefore it is my express opinion that every man should honor Eros; and, for myself, I prize the things of love, and train myself in them exceedingly, and urge the same on others. And now and ever do I praise the energy and manliness of Eros with all the might I have.

Accept then, Phaedrus, this discourse, if you are willing, as an encomium spoken upon Eros; at all events, whatever and however you are pleased to call it, call it so.