

**I. EROS AND THE FEMALE IN
GREEK POLITICAL THOUGHT
An Interpretation of Plato's *Symposium***

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*They do not understand that being brought apart is
carried back together with itself; it is a back-stretching
harmony as of the bow and the lyre.*

Herakleitus, Frag. 51

*"Tell me, you, the heir of the argument," I said, "what was it
Simonides said about justice that you assert he said correctly?"
"That it is just to give to each what is owed," he said. "In saying
this he said a fine thing, at least in my opinion."*

Plato, *Republic* 331e
(Bloom translation)

I. INTRODUCTION

I hope in what follows to accord the female a respected place in the political philosophy of the classical Athenian authors who, in discussing man's public life, recognized that the political community could not be understood without reference to the female as source and limitation of

**EDITOR'S NOTE: The first two articles are part II of our publication of papers selected from the Conference on Classical Greek Political Thought, sponsored by the Conference for the Study of Political Thought, organized by Melvin Richter, and held at the City University of New York Graduate School, March 30-31, 1983.*

POLITICAL THEORY, Vol. 12, No. 1, February 1984 5-27
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that life. My quarrel is not with the ancient Athenians for their treatment of women; that is past. My quarrel is with those scholars, political theorists in particular, who have failed to recognize the important role that the female plays in the writings of the ancient authors, a role denied them in the actual political and social world of their time, and with those who have found in these writings only a quagmire of misogynist philosophic perspectives. By ignoring the presence of the female or by demeaning it, they deny us the benefit of political philosophies conceived with an appreciation of the significance of the female for a comprehensive understanding of our lives as political beings.¹

In this essay I focus in depth on one work by one author to suggest how we must go about discovering the female where she has not been seen before, and to indicate the significance of such discoveries for understanding Plato's political thought in particular. However, an analysis of one work by one author does not reveal the whole of the Greek understanding of the female's relation to the political. The appearance of the female in Greek political thought is varied, and this article is a plea for more work in this direction rather than a summary of what has been done. I suspect that we will find that not all the Greek authors use the female in the same way. For some she represents the passions, for others the body, for some the family and the private realm, for others the processes of life and birth. That she appears in a variety of guises suggests the complexity of her role and the danger of facile generalizations. For this reason the study of women in Greek political thought must proceed with attention to the whole. Discussions of the female cannot be abstracted from the context and the general intention of the author. The female is part of his statement concerning political life—not an insignificant part, nor all of it. What we do find throughout the writing is a sensitivity to the necessary relationship and subtle balance between the abstract and the particular, between glory and privacy, between male and female. This is a balance that because of our own prejudices we have too seldom acknowledged. To ignore the particular, to live only in a world of public glory, to deny the passions is to deny the peculiar multiplicity of the human experience.

Pericles in Thucydides' history of the Peloponnesian War offers a funeral oration in which he glorifies in speech the valiant deeds of the warriors who denied their private selves and interests for the sake of the whole city. The city and the men who die for her become one in Pericles'

speech as both together attain immortal glory. Pericles concludes his noble panegyric for Athens and her soldiers with the infamous words spoken to the women of his city: "There will be great respect for you who do not fall below your proper nature (*hyparchouses physeōs*), and for the one for whom there is the least renown among men, whether for virtue or for blame" (II.45). These words, attributed to the leader of the Athenian polity, have often been seen as those of a classical misogynist, one who wishes to remove women from the public realm.² While men are able to serve the city with deeds that earn glory, the female must disappear from the realm of both speech and deed. Women are thus removed by Pericles from the realm of male immortality, from unity with the city's glory.

We should, however, ask ourselves whether Pericles, through Thucydides' words, allows women to withdraw from the self-denial demanded of Athenian citizens, men whose lives must be lived in order to die for the city. These are men whose individual lives and whose individual names are lost in the community that is Athens. Are we imposing on Pericles' words of advice to the women our own sense that what is good is possible only in the realm of the city and of speech? Do our own concerns make us ignore what might be a subtle criticism of a vision of political life where the only goal is glory? Indeed, in this third speech in Thucydides' history, Pericles must appeal no longer to the Athenians' desire for glory, and to the abandonment of the self for the sake of the community; now, he must tie the Athenians' private lives directly to the welfare of the city and unite them in their concern for individual security rather than their love of the glorious city. Were the women sent back to their private lives perhaps to show us the other model at the basis of the Athenians' strength? Pericles' vision of Athens, the schoolhouse of Greece, does not outlive him. Was his attempt to dismiss blatantly the private realm part of his failure to build a lasting Athens—one that would not be dependent on the speech of such men as Thucydides to preserve its memory?

The funeral oration is a speech of excess—of the power of the community to transcend what is private including the body itself.³ It is an excess and an optimism soon belied by the plague that reminds us of our inability to escape from our bodies; it is that body, unspoken of, that controls and limits the glorious land of masculine speech. Must we not see the female as standing on the threshold and reminding us of all that Pericles wishes to forget, of all that limits his political dreams for the city

of Athens? By mentioning her, even to banish her from the realm of discourse, does he not remind us that we cannot banish women from the understanding of political life?

I ask these questions only half rhetorically. I do not have clear answers and do not propose that the answers would ever be clear. But I do think that these are questions that are worth asking of this famous passage, and ones that we will be unable to answer meaningfully until we take seriously the role of the female in Greek political thought as a whole. She stands there not simply to be sent home, but to remind us that there is such a thing as home, a realm in which the abstract glory of the city yields to the particularity of individual relationships.

Women have been hidden for the most part from the contemporary analysis of the political thought of the classical authors not because they are not there, but because we often have not chosen to look for them. This is, I would suggest, the result of certain blinders that developed with the rise of seventeenth-century liberalism. With the rejection of patriarchy and the divine right of kings, liberalism developed a world inhabited by equals and began the analysis of political life with the individual in the state of nature, in isolation from natural particularistic ties that might bind one individual to another such as a husband to a wife, a child to a mother. The individual joining other isolated individuals creates the political sphere not as a realm of community, but of protection and adjudication. The implicit assumption here (at least from Locke on) is that the individual involved in the liberal construction of political space is male.

Once the political act of creation is accomplished through the social contract, the individual withdraws from political life. Competitive striving for glory is destructive of the political order that has been so precariously created. With Hobbes and Locke the private realm of economic activity replaces political and military service as the new civic virtue. Private space, the realm of *oikonomia*, becomes the realm of males displaced from their public life. It is about such displaced males that the liberal political theorists write for the most part. As both public and private had become male spaces in the theoretical framework of liberalism, the female is denied an important place in the portrait of society presented by these authors.

The female having neither public nor private role for the most part disappears from the political discourse of the liberal authors. But that does not mean that she was not there before the rise of liberalism. That we re-discover her in the writings of the classical authors has been

insisted upon by scholars working within the tradition of the new scholarship on women,⁴ scholars who have been concerned that one half of the human species not be ignored in the academic studies of the human race. But in order to understand political theory as the ancient authors understood it and intended their audience to understand it, we must comprehend how they incorporated women into their political visions. For women are there though they have not always been seen. The funeral oration has been read by generation after generation and the final words of advice offered to women acknowledged, remarked on briefly, especially with regard to Pericles' own relationship with a woman much talked of,⁵ but never questioned. Why did Pericles (Thucydides) need to add this point, *especially* considering its inappropriateness to Pericles' mistress?

Within the last ten years there has been considerable reaction to the earlier academic lack of concern with the female as she appears in the writings of classical literature, and to some degree in the works of political philosophers. Often, however, this has led to a vision of the female in the literature and philosophy of antiquity as a reflection of her status in the socioeconomic world of the male author who happens to be incorporating her into his work—and this means an emphasis on the society's and the author's misogyny. Susan Okin begins her book *Women in Western Political Thought* with a chapter on Greek misogyny. The implication is that since the society of ancient Greece was organized around misogynist principles and the exclusion of the female from all realms of public power, the literature that emerged from that society must reflect that misogyny.⁶ Okin's book is only one of several instances,⁷ and in the literature of the feminist movement the references back to Greek misogyny fly free and easy.

We cannot deny that there was such a strand of misogyny in Greece—nor that women were excluded from the political realm. Nevertheless, this is not to deny that among the playwrights and the philosophers of Athens there was a subtle understanding of the feminine as a vitally important aspect of the human experience, and that a meaningful political life had to take account of the female and recognize her as an important qualification on the abstract public life of the city. Rather than see the philosophers as apologists for their societies, as spokesmen for a political order that suppressed and segregated women, we must see them as critics and analysts, discovering for the Athenians the foundations of their society and discoursing on the adequacy as well as the inadequacy of those foundations. Pericles' reference to the females of

the city alerts us to the coming of the plague. The glory of the city cannot ignore the body that is necessary to build up that city. The abstraction from body, death, and all that is private which characterizes the praise of the city in the funeral oration is only a utopian vision. Meanwhile, women stand there lamenting the loss of sons and husbands, and the real city of deeds and bodies stands on the verge of the destructive plague.

At the base of the analyses of their society by the ancient authors is a keen sense of balance so graphically presented by Aristotle's mean, or the symmetrical order of the Greek artistic productions from the public pediments to the private vases and wine cups. And part of this balance entails the relationship between the male and the female as modes of external and internal, public and private, war and peace. The Greek intellect is characterized by its penchant for dichotomization; division and classification run through both Plato's and Aristotle's works, but the diacritical method is moderated by an awareness of interdependence; public depends on the private, as private depends on public. The abstract derives from the particular while the particular gains meaning from its association with the abstract. And so it is with the male and the female as well.

The Greek authors acknowledge differences between members of their societies—differences between master and slave, between barbarian and Greek, between poor and rich, between male and female, but in acknowledging those differences they did not exclude but recognized the importance of the "other" both as threat and as limit. The barbarian was human but did not speak Greek; he was similar in form, but different in speech. For Aristotle the master and the slave are disturbingly similar, and yet he searches mightily for the criterion of nature by which he might distinguish them. The female similarly is the other side of the male. Without the female there is no meaning to being male, as without slave there is no meaning to being master or without the barbarian the Greek loses his significance. But where the relationship between the male and female differs in important ways from the other dichotomies is in the *necessity* of the relationship between the two. The other sets of opposites help us to understand who is a master and who is Greek. The male-female relationship is not only intellectually helpful; we are driven to such relationships, that is, eros enters into the relationship between male and female as it does not into the relationship between Greek and barbarian. It is in this context that the eros of my title enters—we cannot understand the position of women in Greek political thought without understanding the role of eros as the drive for the creative unity of opposites.

II. PLATO'S SYMPOSIUM

I turn now to Plato's *Symposium* to support some of the broad claims made above. On the surface this dialogue does not appear particularly apposite to the question of women in political thought. Apart from the absence of dialogue devoted specifically to politics, it is usually recognized as the dialogue in which the male's love for another male is extolled by the various participants, while heterosexual relations are denigrated. The men drinking together at the festive meal discourse on the male vision of love and the homosexual relations among the characters openly appear as the characters act out homosexual jealousies with the most sophisticated of banter. Indeed, this dialogue can easily be cited as evidence of the female's exclusion from the life of the Greek intelligentsia.⁸ We find no woman sitting in the circle, drinking as she pleases. The flute girl is sent off; she is to play for herself or for those within. The men cannot be distracted from their love of the male and their praise of male love.

In the *Republic*, women are not part of the discourse but they are brought into the political life of the city Socrates founds. This introduction to public life is dependent on the death of eros, the denial of anything one might call one's own. As eros is suppressed, the difference between the public and the private is obliterated and the female rides, judges, and learns alongside the male. By removing the potential for eros with the destruction of bodily concerns in the early books of the *Republic*, Socrates appears to have created a city in which, at least among the ruling class, sexual differentiation is barely acknowledged. In order to enter Socrates' city at the highest level, women's differences from the males of the city must be denied, their sexuality reduced and their maternity proscribed. When the erotic as the love of one's own returns in Book VIII of the *Republic* with the decline of regimes, the female returns to the household. Socrates' city cannot endure the erotic female in its midst.

The *Symposium* raises the question of what happens to the female when eros is retained, indeed made the center of the evening's discourse. In contrast to old and sexually dead Cephalus, at the beginning of the *Republic*, we begin the *Symposium* with the erotic Apollodorus, the lover of Socrates whose eros for his mentor controls all his behavior—so much so that he becomes an object of laughter and ridicule for those who cannot understand his enthusiasms (173d). Where does the female belong when eros is retained? Can she be incorporated into a study of society or must she simply be sent away as the flute girl is at the

beginning of the *Symposium*, to reappear only at the end of the dialogue accompanying the drunken Alcibiades and marking the return to chaos and tumult?

Eryximachus, the doctor, is the one who sends away the flute girl: "Let her play to herself or the women within," so that the men can be together.⁹ Male intercourse is one of reason and speech (176e), not passion and music. We must, however, contrast these preliminary arrangements concerning the flute girl with the end of the dialogue when both music and the female enter with the drunken Alcibiades. Alcibiades' arrival is announced not only by the tumultuous noise outside the door, but also by the music of the flute girl (212c) that reaches the assembled guests before the actual appearance of the laureled Alcibiades, led into the room on the arm of the flute girl.

Alcibiades' dependence on the flute girl is accentuated in the speech he offers as an alternative to an encomium on love. With images of flutes Alcibiades begins his praise of Socrates. He compares Socrates to the Sileni that sit in the statuary shop. These are the little figures holding pipes or flutes that the craftsmen make. "Are you not a flute player?" Alcibiades asks Socrates (215b) as he compares him to Marsyas, the flute-playing challenger to Apollo. Alcibiades recognizes that the power of Socrates' words can only adequately be described with reference to the power of the flute to control men's souls (215e; 216c). Eryximachus, rejecting the music of the flute and relying on reasoned speeches, failed to recognize the power of music, especially flute music that is associated throughout the dialogue with the female. It is the drunken Alcibiades who must reintroduce women and music in order for us to understand the character of Socrates and what has been forgotten in the earlier speeches.

It is also the drunken Alcibiades who recognizes the impact of Socratic music on all: "Whenever we hear another person speak, even an especially good orator giving speeches, it affects us, so to speak, not at all. But when someone hears you or another speaking your words, even if the speaker should be someone worthless, if a woman should hear or a man or a youth, we are struck and possessed" (215d). The music of Socrates' flute goes beyond the boundaries Eryximachus wishes to set upon reasoned discourse. It is not limited in its impact by the sex, age, or social position of hearer. Eryximachus and Agathon try to create a community that pretends to be free¹⁰ but it is founded on exclusion. Male discourse is likewise based on exclusion. Alcibiades

presents a man whose music need not exclude any. Socrates has accomplished, according to Alcibiades, the combination of the speech Eryximachus sees as fitting for men and the music of the flute that the doctor saw as fitting only for women within. Socrates is the hermaphrodite character whom Aristophanes, in his speech, says no longer exists. Socrates, who cultivates a certain femininity, as in his feminine oaths or self-definition as a midwife, is not unfamiliar with the abuse that follows the androgyne,¹¹ but he proudly retains that unity. It is this unity scorned by many that enables Socrates to appeal to those drawn to the pursuit of political glory such as Alcibiades and those who reject it such as Apollodorus.¹²

Alcibiades compares Socrates as well to the Sirens, those female “enchanters of all mankind and whoever comes their way.”¹³ Whoever hears them has no chance of returning home, drawn instead to destruction on the reefs surrounding their island. Alcibiades must cover his ears to protect himself from the enchanting music of Socrates’ speech. Socrates is again in this image the female whose music draws the corrupt Alcibiades away from the corrupt political life. We the readers of the dialogue, knowing well the history of Alcibiades’ political life, wonder whether he might not have done better to have left his ears uncovered, to have listened to the flute and the siren’s call of the feminine Socrates.¹⁴

The political world to which Alcibiades withdrew was the world of males, dependent on words. The female of the Greek world does not engage in that land of speech, but for that reason she is able to understand and exercise the power of music. The women may be excluded from the public sphere and sent within to play for themselves, but in doing so the males, led by Eryximachus, have limited themselves by exorcising an important element of the human psyche. Alcibiades perhaps alone among the encomiasts has understood that power and rejected it. He knows that he must cast off one half of his personality in order to be political. His understanding of that half, shown in his praise of Socrates, makes him fear it. The others cast the female aside without considering her power.

The successive speeches of the dialogue progressively exclude the female until we reach Socrates’ encomium where the female is introduced palpably in the character of Diotima, in the presentation of the legend of the birth of Eros, and in the heterosexual description of the ascension to a vision of beauty. Alcibiades’ entrance and speech, following hard on Socrates’ presentation, recalls for us the duality of the sexes

and their interdependence. Let us trace some aspects of this progressive exclusion and successive inclusion.

Phaedrus begins by praising love because of love's age—as indicated by the absence of any parents. Love is great because generation was not necessary for its existence. This is necessary for Phaedrus' understanding of the world, for his model is one that tries explicitly to escape love as a generative creative force. Instead, we find love associated with death throughout his speech, as he tries to relate love exclusively to the political world of war and battle. Thus, in praising love he turns to a vision of armies composed of homosexual couples whose sense of shame causes them to fight and to die well. Eros has no generative elements, neither in its origins nor in its consequences. We do not need the female since there is no creativity in Phaedrus' praise of love. The political realm that defines the arena in which he analyzes love is understood here only as a realm of death.

Phaedrus' speech includes the only favorable reference to a woman before Socrates' speech. Phaedrus tells of Alcestis whose love for her husband makes her willing to die in his place; such is the strength of eros that it can make even the normally timid female brave, that is, it can give to women characteristics that they do not have by nature. But still love's power leads to death rather than to life and generation. By giving to his female the political virtue of courage, useful in the armies of men, Phaedrus has love change this woman from a life-giver to a death-seeker. To earn his praise, the female must become male. In contrast to Alcestis, for Phaedrus, stands the cowardly Orpheus who cannot bear the thought of death in order to be reunited with his beloved. His cowardliness is marked by his own death at the hands of women. It is, of course, Orpheus who understands music and is able to use that music to control even death itself. Phaedrus, the beloved of the doctor who had originally sent away the flute girl, fails to recognize this side of Orpheus' personality. All Phaedrus sees is the shameful stoning to death by women.

Pausanias, the student of comparative legal systems, offers his speech in praise of love by excluding what Phaedrus had shown to be the only unqualified example of love. Pausanias separates out the love of and by the female; it is sordid, what belongs to the masses of people who care naught for virtue. Unlike the love of the male, which arose without the benefit of a mother (180d), the common Aphrodite had both mother and

father as parents. However, as Pausanias proceeds to describe his love and its practice in a variety of cities, it becomes apparent that the heavenly love that he praises is no more and no less sordid than the popular love he scorns. The language is openly sexual¹⁵ and Pausanias makes no attempt to dissociate himself from the body; his talk of noetic things is a cover for his concern with the physical seduction of young boys. He offers a crass distinction between male and female that is continued by the other interlocutors up to Socrates. The vulgarity of his distinction becomes apparent when we realize that he himself provides no justification for the separation. It is based on the misogyny for which the Greeks have become famous (notorious). Diotima will raise questions about the validity of Pausanias' distinction.

Eryximachus, the doctor, does little to remedy this separation of heavenly and popular loves, but he does unwittingly introduce a central theme concerning the male and the female. He emphasizes love's role within the context of the whole of nature. He transcends the political worlds that had confined the previous two speakers and turns to the natural world. When he looks there he is confronted with diversity, with opposites, with the difficulty of integrating that which was not all alike. The city built itself up with citizens who were similar to one another, similar in their origins, in their birth, their sex, their wealth, whereas the natural world accommodated and integrated opposing forces that are "brought apart and carried back together." The ancient city was not a melting pot. It needed to exclude from citizenship those who were different. Eryximachus, the scientist among the company, cannot accept the citizen's avoidance of diversity; indeed he understands his world by establishing dichotomies and asserting that an excess of either side of the dichotomy leads to disorder and chaos. What is needed according to the doctor is the careful balancing of parts, of opposites, of hot and cold, of dry and moist. The hiccoughs of Aristophanes come from an excess and must be moderated by equally excessive purgings. Nature composed of variety and diversity offers disharmony which the doctor's *technē*—a careful understanding of those opposites—can control. The politician's art of integrating men who are similar as citizens appears child's play in contrast to the godlike role Eryximachus must play in the art of reconciling all of nature's diversity.

The opposites that Eryximachus discusses are simple—heat and cold, bitter and sweet, dry and moist. He himself omits, but leaves to the

reader and listener to include, the opposites of the male and the female that also must be kept in careful balance if harmony is to be achieved. He does make reference back to Pausanias' popular love (*Eros pandemos*, 187e) and calls her by the name Polumnia, the muse of many or diverse songs, who must be applied with all caution so there be no intemperance (*akolasia*). Sexual differences can call forth sexual intemperance, but the harmony between the sexes is also necessary for the natural world to continue in existence. There are for Eryximachus two loves (187e-188a), but in contrast to Pausanias he insists that a true understanding of nature must incorporate both.

Pausanias had forgotten that the city as well as the realm of the natural world needs the popular form of love. Eryximachus, by considering the whole of nature rather than just the limits of the city, is able to turn attention to the harmony of opposites that so threatens both Phaedrus' and Pausanias' understandings of love within the city. Because he is willing to acknowledge opposites, Eryximachus is also able, unlike the other two, to appreciate music, its creation of harmony out of opposites. "Mousike" is the knowledge of erotic things about harmony and rhythm (187c). Eryximachus' harmony acknowledges a world built up out of opposites. But this harmony is one that has in its turn ignored politics and the needs of the city. He abstracts from the particular manifestation of nature in the world of the city. To bring opposites together, he seems to say, to incorporate both the male and the female, we must move above the uniformity of the male and city and rise to the *technē* of the doctor. The city fears the female because it cannot reconcile opposites; the art of the doctor, Eryximachus claims, can.

Aristophanes in his speech praises love as the healer, the doctor of mankind. He has reason to be grateful to the doctor who had healed his troublesome hiccoughs, who had brought his body back to its harmonious state, albeit through a host of most disharmonious treatments. The theme of reconciliation or harmony that had dominated the scientific presentation of the doctor is in Aristophanes' speech given its fantastical imagery in the tale of the original forms of the human species. As the comic poet offers his encomium on love he avoids the noble language of his predecessors in speech, and talks not of moral virtue nor of noetic things, but of the bodies that Pausanias and even the doctor Eryximachus had tried so delicately to avoid. Aristophanes talks of male bodies, of female bodies, of navels and of privy parts, of holes and the filling of holes.

Specifically he talks of the problem of completion, of our search for wholeness, our desire to possess that which we lack. Among the original

three sexes, Aristophanes tells his audience there were the male-female, the female-female, and the male-male; the gods' punishment for the daring of mankind who had been strong in its unity and completion had been to split the human species into two and thus leave us with only two sexes. The androgyne, the union between male and female, no longer exists (with perhaps one notable exception) in this world characterized by suffering and longing. In the early parts of his speech Aristophanes does not distinguish between the sexes. Both suffer the sense of loss, the absence of once-complete, spherical forms.

The immediate consequences of the division of humans perpetrated by Zeus is death that comes from the ceaseless search for one's tally. Life, what there is of it, comes from the ground rather than from sexual intercourse. Creation of the species anew is not an act that entails the mingling of bodies of the opposite sex. It is, though, the introduction of sexuality that allows the species to continue to exist. Before Zeus introduces sexuality through his craftsman Apollo, all eros, longing, had led to death because all efforts were spent searching for one's other half or clinging to the other once that half was found. Now eros and the clinging to another leads to life through reproduction, as Zeus arranges that genitals be placed in front and "through these made generation through the male in the female" (191c). The heterosexual significance of this new means of satisfaction is important, but only briefly. For heterosexuality allows for momentary satiety, that is, it allows those who have found a beloved to be satisfied and to turn to other endeavors—such as the city. And with the rise of the city, the heterosexual relationships that had saved the species are now engaged in only under compulsion of the laws. By nature, true men would not reproduce themselves, according to Aristophanes (192b).

The true men, those who never mixed with the female, are the bravest and the most daring (192a). When they mature, they go into politics and continue to avoid women. Thus, Aristophanes' vision of political life cannot encompass what is other. The males entering the world of political life seek out those who are most similar and who seek unity in their similarity rather than in the complementarity of differences. He explicitly says that political men enjoy those who are similar [*to homoion* (192a) and *to suggenes* (192b)]. This political symmetry stands in stark contrast to the family existing as one of unity from diversity and difference. The political realm, according to Aristophanes, subdues what is different, and in Aristophanes' speech it is the female who is different (it could as easily be the slave or the barbarian), but his political world has no room for those who introduce the element of diversity. He

follows the lead of the first two speakers for whom morality and courage were practiced for the most part among men who were similar.

However, while Aristophanes' pride of the male and the descendents of the double male agrees with the earlier speakers' prejudices, his conception of the role of eros in our lives is closest to that offered by Socrates. Both Socrates and the comic poet consider love from the perspective of its power to move individuals in the search of what they lack. Thus, they both come to understand love also as a source of pain. Love is not a god who leads us to happy complacency; he is a god who drives us on in an endless pursuit of what we lack. They sense that the life we now live is not so harmonious as Eryximachus would have us believe. Rather, life is filled with anxieties and uneasiness.

In Aristophanes' case this unease can only be finally resolved with our death. Since the gods have destroyed the true unity of our bodies, we must escape our bodies; we must escape that which affirms our separation from others and become bodiless souls capable of enjoying a final and complete unity. To clarify this point Aristophanes introduces the image of the net of Hephaestus, a gift offered to lovers who wish to be bound together forever:

Are you eager to become as much as possible joined with each other so as not to leave one another neither night nor day. If you are eager for this, I am willing to fuse and weld you together so that being two you will become one and be one so long as you live; . . . and when you die, there again in Hades, having died, you will be one in common instead of two (192e).

In death these lovers can achieve the completion that had been denied them by their bodies. The comic poet, the one so concerned with bodies on stage, describes a love that can only be satisfied by abstracting from that which is body; for him the abstraction from body leads down into Hades. Socrates' eros is the desire also to be united with what we lack; it too is abstracted from body in its culmination, but Socrates' eros leads to immortality and not death. The erotic travels of Socratic lovers lead not downwards from the unity of those who are similar, but upward through the love of what is other.

For both Aristophanes and Socrates the completion that comes from the satisfying of eros leads to a self-sufficiency whether in the immortality offered by begetting of the beautiful or in the death accompanying Hephaestus' net. The political world in both disappears,

for those who are self-sufficient have no need of political life. The realm of conflict, of war, of execution, of discourse is composed of partial beings seeking completion. The completion that both Aristophanes and Socrates envision takes their lovers away from the city, as ones who cannot be brought back down or up to it. Both Aristophanes and Socrates teach that completion makes the city irrelevant. The city arises to satisfy our incompleteness, our failure to reach our *eidōs*, our form, on our own. Eros helps us to transcend our inadequacies. For Aristophanes this inadequacy can only be overcome by the unity of those who are similar, while Socrates the androgyne elaborates the importance of difference and the creative unity that does not lead to an Aristophanic death.

Socrates' speech is introduced with a dialogic preface between Socrates and the poet Agathon intended to establish the importance of opposites. Love being of the beautiful cannot itself be beautiful, or being of the good, it cannot be itself good. The dichotomous world controls the thought expressed here. The boundaries must be sharply cut. Does this mean that to love the male one cannot be male? that Aristophanes' love of those who are similar incorrectly understands love? The extension of the argument here does not make sense and if it were an accurate extension would no doubt raise serious problems for the previous speakers in the dialogue who priding themselves on their manly courage would not want to see themselves as non-males loving males. Nevertheless, Agathon is led to confusion and cannot contradict Socrates. The premise of Socrates' speech appears to be this exclusive dichotomous perspective. We begin the analysis from this point, but it soon becomes apparent that the dichotomy is inadequate—that rather than separating out qualities, be they the beautiful and the ugly, the good and the bad, male and female, we need to understand what is intermediary, what is between both and yet neither by itself—our model is something like the hermaphrodite as well as the daemon. The one devoted to opposites is left in a morass of confusing assertions. Agathon's *aporia* is the result of his inability to understand that which is intermediate.¹⁶

To offer his speech on love Socrates turns to a woman, the famed Diotima from Mantinea. That Socrates knows about love from a woman has been remarked upon before. However, we must be careful and not simply acknowledge the female brought in to talk about love

matters. Socrates introduces her as a mantic, a seer who is skilled in the art of communication with the gods. She was able, he tells us, to teach the Athenians which sacrifices to employ to delay the plague. This, Socrates suggests, testifies to her ability to discourse on love matters. However, we must reflect on the advice that she gave to the Athenians. They were able to postpone the plague but not prevent it; by postponing it, though, the plague struck Athens during the Peloponnesian War, at a time when it would have the most devastating effects. Athens was overcrowded as her citizens fled from the countryside into the city where there was not adequate housing or shelter for them.¹⁷ Had the Athenians not been crowded into the city as they would be ten years later the effects of the plague could have been moderated. The female seer does not foresee the political events that will devastate the Hellenic world, nor does Socrates in his praise of Diotima acknowledge the political implications of the exercise of the mantic's power. The female and the philosopher—the experts in *erotike*—abstract from the political world. Socrates learns of love from a woman because the lovers he describes are unlike the male-focused lovers of the earlier speeches; they are apolitical.

As Socrates' tale begins he recalls the conversation between himself and Diotima that parallels that one he has just carried on with Agathon, but this time Diotima moves him beyond the dichotomy of simple opposites. "Have you not observed that there is something half-way between wisdom and ignorance?" she asks (202a). From here she moves to the daemon, one who is neither human nor god, but both; Eros is such a daemon, an intermediary between the human and the gods such as the seer, the prophetess. It is Socrates himself in his recollections of his conversation with Diotima who asks about the generation of this daemon. Where does the intermediary come from? The others had all offered their generation myths—or had expressly denied the generation of eros as in Phaedrus' speech, while Pausanias had insisted that the good form of love had no mother. Socrates' love has both father and mother—and incorporates the characteristics of both. "It is a rather long tale to go through," she said. "All the same, I will tell you" (203b). There follows Diotima's charming tale of Poverty and Plenty, with many characteristics of Poverty reminding us of Socrates himself—one who hangs around doorways as Socrates does earlier on in the evening. It is the resourceless (*aporian*, 203b) Poverty who plots how to create a child; she is the one who is the seducer, the schemer, the deviser of plans

to take advantage of the drunken, sleeping motionless Plenty. In the subsequent description of love once he has been born, the attribute of plotting is ascribed to his inheritance of his father, but in the story of love's generation the scheming comes from the female Poverty. Plenty did not scheme; he simply lay in a drunken sleep. It was need who devised the scheme that led to the birth of love. Plenty was no aid and had no relevance for men until united with need in the birth of love. Then, he aids in the creation of passion that moves men out of a self-satisfied stupor to search, to scheme, to plot, to acquire what they do not have—the vision of true beauty itself.

The child Eros incorporates the qualities of both the mother and the father. But it is the mother, the female, who gives to Eros those qualities that make him most similar to Socrates. From Poverty he is shoeless and homeless, sleeping on the bare ground with no bedding, resting on porches, living always in need. His father's qualities of manliness, being headstrong and impetuous describe the Socrates of the Platonic corpus as well. As love, Socrates is neither male nor female; he is both. He is that in-between being who gives the lie to the dichotomous perspective of the ancients, as well to any overemphasis on one side as demonstrated in the earlier speeches. It is precisely the mother Poverty who makes Socrates the man we admire, the one who is willing to admit his ignorance and the need to learn, the one who demonstrates the answer to his own question of Diotima: "What use does such a love have for the human race?" (204c).

The answer Diotima gives is one of love as appropriation. We love beautiful things so that they will be ours (204d). But how? What can this mean? How do we appropriate beautiful things? We do not do so through acquisition. We are not Macphersonian possessive individuals. We do so through procreation. In a startling phrase Diotima suggests that all mankind (*pantes anthropoi*) are pregnant (*kuousi*, 206c). She does not distinguish between males and females—indeed, she presents the male as transformed into the female—as capable of becoming pregnant. The virility, the strength, the courage of the father pales before the capacity to be pregnant. It is the female Diotima holds as the model for all mankind—it is her body with its capacity for reproduction that we must simulate in our progress up the ladder of love soon to be described in her speech. The male activity of impregnation yields to the priority of the language of conception and birth.¹⁸ Thus Diotima who

had turned away from questions of the political world in delaying the plague again ignored the masculine world of assertiveness with her model of pregnancy—the female pregnancy assigned to the male.¹⁹

The key to Diotima's analysis of love is pregnancy and birth. It is this that gives to mortals immortality. Whereas the other descriptions of love that had been based on the male perspective led to death, Diotima's, the female's, lead to life, indeed even to immortality. We all—male and female—are pregnant; we all are searching for the beauty on which we can give birth to our burden. There is dismay on the part of some that Diotima, in her hierarchy of births that come from these pregnancies, places the creation of the human child through the female on the lowest rung, but the imagery concerning the rise up the ladder remains the feminine one of pregnancy and labor and birth. We hear instead of pregnant souls (209a) as the ascent moves us away from children to fame, to artists, to cities and finally to the beautiful itself. Bodies are forgotten as the seer describes the different levels of engendering; but always the language is that of reproduction. Thus eros is associated in Socrates' speech with creativity and the feminine. The female is no longer vulgarly associated only with the body as she had been by Pausanias, for example. Diotima transfers this feminine quality to the male as she transforms him into a seeker after true beauty rather than the false gods held up by the earlier speakers who had only been concerned with the male. We may have questions about where she leads us with this feminine imagery, about her abstraction from the body and the loss of ourselves, our individual identities in the sea of universals (210cd).²⁰ But she moves us there through a consideration of the feminine, that which had been eschewed by the previous speakers whose maleness had provided the norm for the analysis of eros. Such a focus, Diotima suggests, had kept them mired in a world of politics, particulars—and death.²¹

III. CONCLUSION

My aim in this analysis was not to provide a complete interpretation of the *Symposium*. I have not done so. My aim was to show that throughout the dialogue the female recurs. The male characters—except those two most wise ones, Alcibiades and Socrates—try to exclude the

female and the feminine. Phaedrus praises homosexual lovers, but finds his model of true love in the willing death of a woman. Pausanias scorns as sordid the popular love of women, but his own love of a young boy is no less sordid, perhaps even more so because of his pretense at nobility, while Eryximachus can talk about the joining of opposites within all of nature and yet not deal with male and female couplings. The harmony he envisions is thus static and sterile. They all try to ignore the hermaphroditic aspect of human nature and the necessity for balance. They present a male world flawed by its one-dimensionality and thus its death. They are like the flat fish or the bas reliefs on the gravestones to which Aristophanes refers at the end of his speech. They fail to reflect multidimensionality, and therefore they are deathlike. The female fills out the human form; the female introduces music and, through eros, the desire for what we lack. She offers to the sterile male pregnancy and creativity. In Diotima's vision she lifts us out of the political world.

The feminine principle is capable of moving us beyond the homosexual armies of Phaedrus eager for death before a beloved, to the attainment of true virtue begotten on beauty itself. But Socrates via Diotima pursuing the feminine principle up the ladder of loves has forgotten the city, for the city cannot exist without the procreation of bodies with which to defend itself. Pericles must urge those parents still capable of procreation to produce more sons to serve as a security for the state (II. 44). The undying tombs in the hearts of men require bodies to have died. Socrates, speaking through Diotima, has ignored the demands of the city, just as by praising her postponement of the plague he had ignored the fact of the upcoming war. Socrates has used the female to abstract from political life to propose an alternative philosophical vision. It is Alcibiades whose entrance reminds us of political life, of the trial that awaits Socrates, of the statues of the Hermae lying shattered at the crossroads, of the appeal of praise coming from the many. It is also Alcibiades accompanied by the flute girl who reminds the group that had abstained from drink that bodies are still important, that the female and sexuality and music and passions and gluttony are all part of the human experience. It is Alcibiades who causes the party to deteriorate into one indiscriminate drinking—but it is also Alcibiades who has the last speech of the dialogue.

It has been noted on several occasions²² that while the Athenian female fades very much into the background as the political and social life of the polis develops, women nevertheless burst forth magnificently

in the realm of the theater and of myth. Within the realm of political philosophy women do not burst forth with such surprising splendor, and thus they have often been taken as performing the same role in the thought of the philosophers as they do in society in general. It was the aim of the above analysis to undercut this assumption. The female in the political thought of Plato (and Aristotle) does not play the same retiring role she does in the society at large. She is an open force of contradiction, clarifying to the male-males (à la Aristophanes) that their values, which have excluded the female and the feminine principles of creativity and birth, have led to a sterile political life that is unbalanced and self-destructive. It is precisely because she is erotic, desirous of giving birth, pregnant with life, and loves what she has created²³ that she can serve as the question mark in the self-satisfied vision of Pericles' utopian presentation of Athens.

The study of women in the history of Greek political thought cannot focus on women in the actual social and political life of the city because, for the most part, she was not recognized as being there. The texts of the political philosophers should not be mined for their descriptions of the female as political or nonpolitical actor, nor should the texts be read simply as reflections of the misogyny of the society. Political philosophy, as I understand it, is a critical endeavor, forcing us to question the value and the meaning of the political community, establishing perhaps alternative visions that can be used to criticize the contemporary structures; it is never a process of the simple acceptance of what exists. Within this understanding of political philosophy, then, the female stands as a handy tool to raise questions about the nature of the male city. At the end of the funeral oration she reminds us of the tensions in Pericles' noble vision of a collectivity of bodiless minds. Pericles had asked his audience to become *erastai*, lovers, of Athens as if we can become lovers of anything so abstract as the city. The female at the end reminds us that we can't. In the central books of the *Republic* Socrates had asked for the same abstraction from our own and from our bodies. The female in Book V of the *Republic* raises questions about Socrates' project and reminds us of what Socrates must do to the human beings—remove them from their natures—to make them part of a perfect city. In the *Symposium* the female raises questions about the arrogance of the male world that would exclude the female and bring to itself death and sterility. The *actual* women who sit at home are of little interest to the

political philosophers. However, the feminine or the concept of the female *is* of interest. It is not always used the same way. In the funeral oration she reminds us of the private realm and of bodies, in the *Symposium* of difference, creativity and the harmony of opposites. Plato uses the feminine not because he cares about women as such, but because the feminine as part of human nature puts limitations on the masculine and allows for the creativity that the male alone lacks. Plato does not want to suggest that the flute girl join the company in their discourse on love. Rather he is proposing for us an internal transformation of ourselves from partial beings like Aristophanes' split creatures to complete humans. We can only achieve this if, with the hermaphroditic Socrates as our model, we become complete individually through acknowledging the male and the female within us.

We are, however, only able to understand this perspective if we begin to look for the female where she has not been seen before and consider how her presence may transform what have been previously considered as male works. She stands obviously in the *Republic* and her presence there has called forth its share of scholarly attention, but she exists in the other dialogues as well. The brilliance of Plato via his Socrates is that despite the misogyny of the grown polis he has been able to incorporate the female into his thinking, far more so than many of the commentators on his works have been able to do.

NOTES

1. This is not to suggest that the Greek authors were in any sense "feminists," only that they were aware of the significance and importance of the female. There are, of course, exceptions to my generalizations, for example Clifford Orwin, "Feminine Justice: The End of the *Seven Against Thebes*," *Classical Philology* 73, 3 (July 1980), pp. 187-196; and J. Peter Euben, "Justice and the *Oresteia*," *American Political Science Review* 76, 1 (March 1982), pp. 22-33.

2. E.g., Susan Moller Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 19-20. Mary Kinnear, *Daughters of Time: Women in Western Tradition* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1982), p. 23. An exception is Mary O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 104-105, though she anachronistically separates glory from speech.

3. Leo Strauss, in *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Phoenix edition, 1978), points out that Thucydides makes his "Pericles avoid the words 'death', 'dying' and 'dead bodies'" p. 194.

4. Sara B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), established the legitimacy of the concern with women in Classical scholarship and summarizes as well the state of the art prior to the 1970s. See also the two *Arethusa* volumes devoted to women in antiquity [6, 1 (Spring 1973) and 11, 1, 2 (Spring, Fall 1978)] and the review essay by Marilyn B. Arthur in *Signs* 2, 3 (Winter 1976) pp. 382-403.

5. E.g., A. W. Gomme, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962) II., p. 143.

6. See esp. p. 25: "Since in a culture as intellectual and civically conscious as that of the Greek aristocratic man, it was virtually impossible for any real intimacy to develop between him and a woman such as the women were forced to become, Plato's belief that only love between men could be the most elevated type is quite understandable. Given the contemporary context, then, it is no wonder that the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* demonstrate such preference for homosexual over heterosexual love." A further problem with Okin's approach is a failure to acknowledge historical change from Finley's Homeric age to Ehrenberg's Athens.

7. O'Brien (1981), Lynda Lange, "The Function of Equal Education in Plato's *Republic*," in *The Sexism of Social and Political Theory: Women And Reproduction from Plato to Nietzsche*, eds. Lorenne Clark and Lynda Lange (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), pp. 3-15; and N.C.M. Hartsock, *Money, Sex and Power: An Essay on Domination and Community* (New York: Longman, 1983), Chapter 8.

8. Okin (1979), pp. 23-24.

9. The Greek for "being together" *suneinai* (176e) has well-known sexual implications.

10. Consider all the freedoms accorded to the slaves at the beginning of the dialogue (175b) and the freedom each has to drink as he pleases (176a).

11. *Gorgias*, 485d.

12. The flute is excluded from the city of the *Republic*; "It's nothing new we are doing . . . in choosing Apollo and Apollo's instruments ahead of Marsyas and his instruments," comments Socrates at 399e. Consider also 561c, where the flute is a sign of the degeneration of the oligarchic man to the democratic man.

13. *Odyssey*, XII.39-40.

14. Martha Nussbaum, "The Speech of Alcibiades: A Reading of Plato's *Symposium*," *Philosophy and Literature* 3, 2 (Fall 1979), pp. 134-139 discusses the relationship of Alcibiades' political life to this dialogue.

15. K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1978) offers insights into the homosexual language of the Greeks, specifically the word 'kharizesthai,' pp. 44 ff.; see 182b, 182d, and 184d in Pausanias' speech.

16. Space limitations preclude a discussion of Agathon's speech. Let me simply note here that Agathon's eros works to transform everything into a soft similarity as the ugly myths and tragic aspects of human life are made pleasant and uniform by the poetic art; he replaces Eryximachus' science with poetry.

17. *Thucydides*, II.52.

18. The obvious contrast here is Apollo's speech at the conclusion of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*.

19. The Loeb editor of the *Symposium* finds this confusing and notes, concerning 206c, "The argument requires the application of 'begetting' and such terms indifferently to either sex."

20. We should think of this passage in relation to the destruction of individuality in the city of the *Republic*. See on this Nussbaum (1979), pp 149-152.

21. Feminist scholars coming from a Marxist orientation interpret these passages quite differently. For them the body, the material substructure, is ignored in the ascent away from human children; the body is then associated with the female and thus the process of love is one that denies much meaning to the female. The material activity of human sexuality in the reproduction of children is replaced by the bodiless male intellect. See O'Brien (1981), p. 132: "Socrates is saying that procreativity and the genetic continuity which is the product of reproductive labor are illusory, unreal and without significance, while abstract proliferations of male ideas have a more concrete reality. What is in fact material becomes ideal and what is in fact ideal becomes material." Also, Hartsock (1983), pp. 196-197, and Okin (1979) p. 25. "Socrates consistently denigrates mere physical procreation . . . in favor of that superior procreancy (sic) which is of the mind." It is an association of the female with the body and of the male with reason and soul that leads to these interpretations. This had been the confusion of some of the earlier male-male speakers whom Socrates through Diotima is trying to correct.

22. Pomeroy (1975), pp. 91-97; Michael Shaw, "The Female Intruder: Women in Fifth Century Drama," *Classical Philology* 70, 4 (October 1975), pp. 255-266; Philip Slater, *The Glory of Hera: Greek Mythology and the Greek Family* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968).

23. See *Republic*, 330c and Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics VIII. 12*.

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