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ARTIGO | ARTICLE

The End of Love? Questioning technocracy in Plato's *Symposium*

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KRINKS, P. (2020). The End of Love? Questioning technocracy in Plato's *Symposium*. *Archai* 29, e02906.

Abstract: Plato's *Symposium* contains two accounts of eros which explicitly aim to reach a *telos*. The first is the technocratic account of the doctor Eryximachus, who seeks an exhaustive account of eros, common to all things with a physical nature. For him medical *techné* can create an orderly erotic harmony; while religion is defined as the curing of disorderly eros. Against this Socrates recounts the priestess Diotima finding a *telos*, not in technical exhaustiveness, but in a

dialectical definition of eros in the light of the good. What is common to all human beings is the desire to be in eternal relation to the good. All *technai* are forms of *poiesis*, by which things pass from being to not being. The erotic harmony recommended by Eryximachus, no less than the Aristophanes' recommendation of eros as "of a half, or of a whole", is subject to the question whether "it happens to be good". A self-harmonisation produced by *techne* can no more evade the sovereignty of good, than can projects of self-completion with a beloved in our likeness.

Keywords: *techne*, *telos*, *eros*, Plato, Diotima.

Introduction

Plato's Symposium is attended by at least one professed technocrat: Eryximachus, the doctor, whose central observation about eros is drawn from "our *techne*, medicine" (186a8). He takes that as his starting-point, "so as to give honour to *techne*" (186b3; Edelstein, 1945, p. 90 & n. 10). For Eryximachus, one benefit of applying a technical, and indeed technocratic, perspective, is to shed light on the defined limits of eros. Eros is, first of all, contrary to the assumption of Pausanias, the previous speaker, to be found "in the souls of human beings towards those are beautiful (*kalous*)" (186a5). This is a more realistic approach to the role of beauty than Pausanias took, even if Eryximachus will not discuss beauty in any sustained way.

More significantly Eryximachus sees eros as of enormous breadth: for it is found not only in human souls, "but so to speak in everything which exists" (186a7). A approach based on *techne*, he suggests, will allow him to develop an account of the necessary breadth during the rest of his speech (185e6-188e5). Thus he will overcome the problem he found to afflict the approach of Pausanias, who, he says, "although he set out well in his discourse, did not

sufficiently bring it to a *telos* – so it is necessary for me to try and put a *telos* on the discourse” (186a1-2).

Later in the dialogue the primacy of *techne* is put in question by the priestess Diotima in a passage of the speech of Socrates (204d3-206a13). Although parts of this passage have been widely discussed, its relation to the speech of Eryximachus has been largely missed. Yet multiple points of contact are signalled in the text. Firstly Diotima agrees that there is a need for discourse about eros to reach a *telos*; even if for her this *telos* is a matter of dialectical coherence, rather than an exhaustive survey. Questions about eros will require an answer which relates it to the good: only such an answer can be complete, and “have a *telos*” (205a3).

Secondly Diotima disagrees also as to the relevant breadth of eros. For her, eros, like *poiesis*, is of enormous but different breadth, as “the whole desire for good things and flourishing found in everyone” – the usual narrower usage of the word eros for those desires relating to “procreation and giving birth” (206e5) notwithstanding.

Thirdly, while Eryximachus’ speech articulates the 4th century perspective which had increasingly sought to “use the techniques of the newly developing sciences to make progress” (Nussbaum 2001.84), for Diotima *techne* is a category unexcitingly contained within *poiesis* (205b8-c1).

Diotima then concludes this section of her discussion with Socrates by asserting the primacy of good over the technically-produced erotic harmony praised by Eryximachus, along with the desired reunification with a lost “other half” considered by Aristophanes. The good is therefore both that to which all eros is oriented, in its desire for eternal relation to it, and the criterion against which desire and its objects should be judged. Only in this understanding will an adequate *telos* be reached.

Eryximachus' Critique Of Pausanias

The previous speaker, Pausanias, had come, as the text punningly emphasises, to a pause: "*Pausaniou pausamenou*" (185c5). Eryximachus offers a cure which will "pause" (*pausetai* 185e3, c.f. 185d2) the hiccups affecting the next speaker, Aristophanes. This more than by-play: the distinction between a pause and aiming for the more complete end constituted by a *telos* will be at the heart of Eryximachus' speech, as he suggested in his criticism of Pausanias' lack of a *telos* (186a1-2).

But what does Eryximachus think a completion, or *telos*, involves? For Phaedrus, the first speaker in the dialogue, the completion which mattered was the ideal end of a hero's life and what followed. For Pausanias the relevant completion was the intellectual and physical maturity of the adolescent through the education achieved in Athenian homosexual relationships.

For Eryximachus, however, the central notion is exhaustiveness: he holds that

eros exists, not only in the souls of human beings towards beautiful people, but also towards many other things and in other things, in the bodies of all living creatures and in things which grow in the earth and, so to speak, in everything which exists (*pasi tois ousi*)... (186a4-7)

Eryximachus' intention is to drastically broaden the field of discussion: from the presence of eros (whether single or double) in human beings, as Phaedrus and Pausanias had suggested, to all of nature.

Certainly the exhaustiveness extends to sexual orientation. Pausanias' defence left most eros (including all heterosexual eros) standing explicitly unpraised. He broadened his discussion beyond Phaedrus' focus, but it was still true that on his account only a homosexual lover with a beloved of just the right age, of which Pausanias' own relationship with the younger Agathon is of course an example (Dover 1980.3, 96), could love well. Pausanias' defence

failed to come to a completion by being too narrow: too narrowly homosexual (Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan 2004.66), as well as too city-specific.

Yet, even as Eryximachus aims to bring his own account to completion, he finds its limit when he reaches it not wholly satisfactory. His words “so to speak, in everything which exists” are consistent with two different ontologies. Are physical objects, including souled human beings, the entirety of all which exists? All bodies and living things is not necessarily the same as everything. To assume so would restrict ontology to exclude gods, as well as the *daimones* which will play a role in Diotima’s account.

Eryximachus speaks of “giving the first place (*presbeuomen*) to *technē*”. These are words full of ambiguity. The transitive use of *presbeuomen* means, literally, to put first in rank, but it has theological overtones of sacralised honour, and even worship. In Athenian tragedy the word had been used for honour paid to a mother’s name (Sophocles *Trachiniae* 1065), paid to a tomb (Aeschylus *Choephoroi* 488) and even to the goddess, Gaia, as put first in prayer (Aeschylus *Eumenides* 1). Whether it is medical *technē* or all *technē* which is exalted is left ambiguous. Neither of these ambiguities will prove irrelevant to Eryximachus’ intent.

Eros As Empedoclean Cosmic Force

For Eryximachus to re-commit to a “double” (186a3) account, focused on *physis* (nature), exhaustive in extent, of an eros taken to be pervasive, cannot help but recall Empedocles’ poem *Peri Physeos* (*On Nature*, Diels-Kranz B17). The textual echoes between the opening lines of Eryximachus’ speech and the longest surviving fragment of the poem are distinct: a *diploun* (double) account (186a3, cf. *dipl’* B17.1, 2); a contrast between that which is one and *monon* (alone: 186a4, cf. B17.1); that which is true of *polla* (many, 186a5) or *pleonon* (B17.2); and that again which is true of all things (*pasi* 186a6, *panton* B17.4) which are naturally growing (*phumenois* 186a7, *diaphuomenon* B17.5).

Thus Eryximachus' remark places his speech in the context of Empedocles' efforts to solve Parmenidean problems about how change in the universe is possible (Barnes, 1979, p. 6-9). Empedocles sought to do this, not with eros as such, but with *philotes* (love). Like eros as conceived by Eryximachus, *philotes* was for Empedocles a pervasive, basic, general and eternal associative force, responsible along with disassociative *neikos* for apparent changes in the physical universe (Robin, 1929, p. lxi; Guthrie, 1965, p. 205; Ludwig, 2002, p. 71).

Eryximachus wishes to assimilate the role of eros to the role of Empedoclean *philotes* (Ludwig, 2002, p. 136-139, Edelstein, 1945, p. 91, 94). Eryximachus is throwing in his lot with a thinker who was committed to find what was the cause of what, in a mode much closer than the contributions of Phaedrus and Pausanias to the contemporary scientific understanding of causes and explanations. The *telos* of Eryximachus' account arises in part because Eryximachus likewise uses a harmony of erotic forces as a single powerful principle with very wide application. This is the scientist's familiar desideratum of theoretical economy, with a small number of principles explaining a large number of instances. Like Empedocles' account, Eryximachus makes everything in the cosmos, not only human beings, an aspect of the physical universe, within the purview of rational enquiry.

But Eryximachus is in fact more radical than Empedocles, perhaps implausibly so, in two ways. Firstly, in Empedocles the physical power of the gods is understood in the light of elemental forces. The associative force acted on four elements ("roots of all things", B6), which were considered in terms of divinity: Shining Zeus (Fire), and Life-bringing Hera (Air) and Aidoneus (Earth) and Nestis (Water). From these things,

running through one another, come to be both humans and the tribes of other beasts, at one time coming together into a single cosmos by Love (*Philotes*), and at another each being borne apart by the hatred of Strife (*Neikos*) (B26).

In Eryximachus there appears to be only the single force of eros. Secondly, Empedocles' cosmic cycle continues eternally and is not controllable by human *techne*. The technical processes Eryximachus advocates lead not only into enquiry about and understanding of the cosmos, but to control of it.

Eros And The Technician

Eryximachus' observation, as to "how great and wonderful is [eros], and how the god extends to everything, divine as well as human" (186a8-b2) is taken from "from medical science, which is my area of expert knowledge (*technes*)" (186a7-8). For Eryximachus to ground his response to the doxological challenge of praising eros in his work as a doctor – or indeed in any other technical domain – is to make a powerful claim for the primacy of *techne*. In doing so he develops the trajectory in contemporary Greek thought which saw *techne* as indeed providing a expertly knowledgeable vantage point from which one might "make observations" (*katheorakenai*, 186a8), or, literally, "look down on" things. It was characteristic of a technique that it brought about a defined end: a further sense in which a *telos* might be reached. The reliable production of such ends was one way in which techniques like medicine (Nutton, 2005) were thought to help human beings control a world otherwise dangerously vulnerable to *tyche* or chance (Edelstein, 1945, p. 97; Nussbaum, 2001, p. 89).

Yet, in arguing, not only that the praise of a divine power lies within his purview, but that such a power can be controlled by him, Eryximachus risks not only co-opting theology to his technocratic perspective, but corrupting it. For the power of eros to be best seen, not by cultic participation or the singing of doxological poetic hymns, but from the standpoint of medical technique makes some sense, if the view of "the god" is a rationalistic one – indeed more rationalistic than Empedocles'. If a scientific account of nature can be applied not only to human beings, but also to gods, then that becomes a further sense in which this account reaches a *telos*, another form of

completion which had eluded Pausanias. To a contemporary Greek rationalist the grounding of Eryximachus' account of eros might then be thought superior to Phaedrus' and Pausanias' groundings in the polytheistic genealogies of gods and goddesses. Yet the claim to control a divine power over-reaches, and invites the critique which Aristophanes goes on to offer.

Eros in the body

Eryximachus' account of the double eros is focused on “the nature (*physis*) of bodies” (186b4). Pausanias had taken eros to be double in the sense of a more ethically and a less ethically acceptable form of desire, inspired by two Aphrodites, a Common and a Heavenly. But Eryximachus' focus is physical health:

what is healthy in the body and what is diseased are, by agreement, different and unlike; and what is unlike loves and desires things which are unlike. So the eros of a healthy person differs from that of a diseased person. (186b4-8)

If therefore there is a problem with eros, the root cause is its potential to be diseased (*nosoun*, 186b4, cf. 186b7). The pre-diagnostic principle for treating a person is that one must identify what is good and healthy in the body and be prepared to favour that and disfavour the reverse. It is this which is the analogy to Pausanias' claim that it is honourable to do favours for human beings who are good, and dishonourable for those who are bad (186b8-c2).

Analogously, in the body, the good and healthy elements it is fine indeed necessary to favour – and this is what we call medicine; and the bad and diseased things it is [not only] shameful [to favour] but indeed necessary to discourage – if someone intends to be a technical expert (*technikos*) (186c3-6)

The implication is that “what is good and healthy” is the flourishing of the physical body. The space for any account of goodness other than a reductively naturalistic understanding of

goodness as bodily flourishing seems to be progressively closed down. Yet “there is much we regard as good which is not healthy” (Dorter, 1969, p. 219).

The doctor must know what the erotic states are, at least in relation to “filling and emptying” (186c7) and then “diagnose in these the eros which is fine and the eros which is shameful” (186c8). That is what is “most doctor-ly”. (186d1). What makes “a good practitioner (*demiourgos*)” (186d4) is “acting creatively” (*poion*, 186d2) to make a change, so that the the right kind of eros is acquired when needed (186d1-3), and so to “reconcile the most hostile elements in the constitution and make them loving friends” (186d4-5).

Clearly Eryximachus has great confidence in the power of medicine. Eryximachus’ confidence contrasts with Pausanias’ view that the the bad eros, which one might hope would be controlled through the application of conventions, would in fact not be: since such conventions do not make a sufficient difference to base people (183e1-4). Eryximachus envisages a good deal of success for the individual’s doctor in controlling eros. Since eros is a natural force, the physician can keep eros controlled so as to maintain health in the body by regulating its level by the filling and emptying, changing the quantity of each kind of eros (Craik, 2001, p. 110). This promise of technical efficacy strikes for many readers a note of bathos: since it seems to “reduce the human pageantry of love to evacuation and repletion” (Ludwig, 2002, p. 137), in a way which could be said to “more closely resemble the workings of a hydraulic pump than an affair of the heart” (Scott & Welton, 2009, p. 63).

The fine eros turns out to be, or at least involve, a kind of harmony. Medicine makes “those things in the body which are most hostile (*echthista*) into friends (*phila*), and makes them desire one another” (186d5-6). This enmity turns out to be a matter of antonymous pairings, presented in contrary relation: “those which are most opposed: cold and hot, bitter and sweet, dry to wet, and everything like that”. Eryximachus seems to moralise, in terms of hostility, a simple difference, making points on a scale by exaggeration into the extremes of the scale and thus into contrary

relations. Yet it is not clear why it would necessarily be a problem for one part of my body to be cold, while another part is hot: let alone why I should need the coldness to desire (*eran* or “feel eros for”) the heat. For Eryximachus it is important that this should be a problem, since that is the justification for the founding of medicine: the gift of Asclepius was knowing “how to impart eros and harmony” and hence he “founded our *techne*” (187e1-2).

Eryximachus’ picture is only superficially coherent. If there is both good and bad eros, and these are analagous to the hot and the cold, does that mean eros (as good versus bad eros) is the contrary of itself, until under the doctor’s guidance, eros feels eros for eros? Or, to look at it the other way, is the eros which is supposed to result between the hot and the cold after expert medical treatment, the same kind of good eros which was to be encouraged at the expense of bad eros? If so, does good eros just mean harmony – and bad eros a lack of harmony? That such could be the case is suggested by the conclusion that “the whole of medicine is governed by this god” and by the relation between *philia* (cf *phila* at 186d5) and eros. This could be interpreted as meaning that medicine is governed by the criterion of the existence (or not) in the body of eros-as-harmony among different (supposedly contrary) elements. But that does not seem to support the account: since harmony in that sense is not the opposite of “enmity” (186d5), if enmity meant a mere difference.

One way of understanding why differences running to extremes could in Erxyimachus’ eyes constitute enmity could be that he is advocating a medically-informed moderation. That would build on his advice at the beginning of the evening, in favour of light drinking (Edelstein, 1945, p. 94). However to emphasise only moderation is to miss the darker note of technical control of eros, rightly characterised by Wardy as one of the dialogue’s several “policies of discrimination, segregation, control and repression” (Wardy, 2002, p. 13; compare Brill, 2006, p. 21).

The Correction Of Heraclitus

Not only, on Eryximachus' account, is the whole of medicine governed by eros, but so are gymnastics, farming – and even music (186e3-187a3). This is consistent with him putting himself forward as spokesman not only for medical *techne*, but for all *techne*. It is the broad scope of eros which enables him to be such: as a general force of harmony – if not, as in Empedocles, association – affecting literally everything in the cosmos.

It is music which yields his famous observation, concerning Plato's predecessor, Heraclitus. The presumed similarity of music to medicine is the need in that domain to engender "love and harmony" among things which are "most hostile and opposite". Eryximachus suggests that this is what

perhaps Heraclitus means to say, although with regard to his wording he does not make the point very well, when he says that The One being at variance with itself is in agreement, like a harmony of bow or lyre (187a3-4).

Although there is uncertainty about exactly what Heraclitus meant (Snyder 1984), in outline he was suggesting that the possibility of a unity of opposites is illustrated by the way in which the bow or lyre, being composed of opposite elements, is nonetheless a unity. Heraclitus' interest in opposites (Emlyn-Jones, 1976, p. 111; O'Brien, 1967) was that they were in fact, against what might appear, "one", or "the same". That was either in the strict sense of identity, or more loosely in the sense of a higher unity or essential connection (Emlyn-Jones, 1976, p. 94). In Plato's dialogues, how, or indeed whether, opposites can be "compresent" is one crucial metaphysical concern (Nehamas, 1973; Fine, 1993, p. 54-61; McCabe, 1994, p. 37-47), and one might speak of Plato's own "Heracliteanism" (Irwin, 1977; Wardy, 2002).

Yet for Eryximachus "there is a great incoherence (*alogia*) in saying that a harmony differs, or is composed of elements which still differ" (187a6-7). There should, on his account, be an analogy

between: a technical musical process to create a harmony out of notes which are at variance; and medicine making a friendly unanimity out of bodily elements which are hostile or opposed to each other. But, as he sees it, the analogy is not supported by Heraclitus, who supposes that, while still differing, they were in harmony.

Eryximachus' critique is that that cannot be the case, for there must have been a process, and indeed – if the analogy is to be sustained – a technical process, to take them from difference to harmony, which Heraclitus has elided.

Perhaps what [Heraclitus] meant to say is that from the high and the low which were previously differing, then later an agreement has been engendered by the musician's *techne* (187a9-b2).

If so, that would be properly the analogy of rhythm as Eryximachus understands it. Starting from “the fast and the slow, things which initially were at variance”, but “later come to agreement”, so rhythm “comes into being” (*gegone*: 187b7-c2).

One could see Eryximachus' point as following along with an Empedoclean critique of Heraclitus (Wardy, 2002, p. 7 & n. 11). For Eryximachus, a process is needed to create unity out of difference (construed as opposition, or even quasi-moralistically as hostility). That process is analogous to the Empedoclean associative force of *philotes*, which Heraclitus' system lacked.

But in Eryximachus' system, I have argued, Empedoclean *philotes* has been transmuted to *eros*. The idea of a cycling cosmic force working with an offsetting dissociative force of *neikos*, has been displaced (Anderson, 1993, p. 37) by an idea of harmony represented by a governing *eros* – but governed in its turn by the *techne* which controls *eros*. In that case the disturbing metaphysical paradox about differing things being one (Wardy, 2002, p. 5) has been replaced by the ethically disturbingly view of *techne* as the governing force of the cosmos. This shows why Eryximachus must oppose Heraclitus. If things which differ already constitute a unity, then *techne* cannot take the envisioned place of honour.

Eryximachus' critique is in fact most significantly of Heraclitus' untechnocratic perspective.

Developing Pausanias' Ethic

The moralisation of difference as problematic is extended when Eryximachus returns to Pausanias' argument, that

it is to those who are orderly, and so that those who are not yet orderly should become so, that one should do favours; and one should preserve their eros, this is the Heavenly eros, the eros of the Heavenly muse (187d5-8).

Yet, despite Eryximachus' claim to continue Pausanias' argument, this extension is not in fact continuous with it. Firstly the inspiration of the two Aphrodites has been replaced with two of the muses from the catalogue offered by Hesiod at *Theogony* 75-79. That sustains the role of eros in not only medicine but music, the latter naturally under the guidance of the muses. However the link to the Olympians is thereby pointedly undermined. The Olympians are in fact never mentioned in Eryximachus' speech: not even Apollo, although he was the patron of Eryximachus' two chief topics, medicine and music (Hunter, 2004, p. 57). And when Eryximachus extends his discussion of orderliness to the seasons, weather, and astronomy, he abandons without comment (Ludwig, 2002, p. 137) any traditional explanation of natural phenomena through the existence and actions of specific gods and goddesses.

Secondly, when it comes to eros Of The People (187e1), Eryximachus fails to condemn it in the way Pausanias did. Rather, this eros may be experienced, so as to gain its pleasure, but with care. Whether it is a good thing depends on how it is applied. This is a further step away from Pausanias' position that the evaluation of eros, and indeed anything, depends on the way it is done: Heavenly eros being eros done well, eros Of The People not so. On Eryximachus' account there is more radical relativisation: even

problematic eros Of The People can be done well or not. All things in moderation, is a different prescription to Pausanias’.

Thirdly, it is not the same quality which Eryximachus and Pausanias would suggest seeking and increasing in a lover. For Pausanias it was “wisdom or some other part of virtue” (184c5-6). For Eryximachus it is “orderliness” (*kosmiois, kosmioterois*, 187d5-6, also 188c4), and then “moderation and justice” (*sophrosunēs kai dikaiosunēs*, 188d5). “Orderliness” is an appropriately broader word, which can apply to plants and animals, and to the bodies and characters of human beings. But it is not an ethical word as such. So far as Eryximachus has explored its meaning, that has been in terms of bodily health and physical flourishing. An account of the virtues approached via this notion of orderliness may seem unacceptably naturalistically compromised; and such a *technē* may seem no more than “the artful manipulation of processes that lack, on their own, a determinant and motivated motion towards the good” (Brill, 2006, p. 20).

The religion of *technē*

The territory of religion has been steadily occupied by *technē*, as Eryximachus has proceeded. It is not therefore wholly a surprise when he brings it explicitly within the scope of his argument. He argues that

all sacrifices, and the whole province of the prophetic – things which are the communion of gods and human beings with each other – are concerned only with the preserving and curing (*iasin*) of eros (188b7-c3).

To bring it within scope is one thing, but the extent of his ambition is at the same time staggering, if it is the technician who can preserve and cure eros in this sense. That technical work will be what priesthood and prophecy are to come to. If there is a god to be worshipped, it will be in the first place eros – of the right type:

for every kind of impiety is likely to ensue if a person gratifies and honours and exalts (*presbeuei*) in all his actions, not the orderly eros, but the other one – in regard to his parents and the living and the dead and the gods (188c3-6).

But then eros itself is governed by *techne*: it is

for those things that a priest performs examinations (*episkopein*) on people who feel eros, and cures them, and priesthood is to be a craftsman of friendship between gods and human beings (188c6-d2).

But traditional priests do not have such skills of examination. So their practices fail to qualify as a *techne* in the relevant sense, and the technician must displace the priest, in a religion of the technical control of human life through eros (Macpherran, 2006, p. 85-87).

What has been implicit so far is made explicit when it is said that “the whole of eros has such a great or vast, or rather all, power and might” (188d4). Therefore, the eros praised by Eryximachus is, like Empedoclean *philotes*, a natural power or force (*dunamin*). Whether this particular account of eros as *dunamis* is adequate will be the central challenge shortly posed by Aristophanes to Eryximachus (189c6).

If all eros has been defended throughout as a power, then it is “eros which is brought to a *telos* in relation to good things [...] which has the greatest power” (188d6-7). Eryximachus implies that something else, someone else, beyond eros is needed to control eros and bring it to a *telos* of orderliness. Only an eros fulfilled in that way can “provide happiness (*eudaimonian*)” (188d8) and “give us power to associate and have friendship with each other and with the gods” (188d8-e1). Step forward, then, to wield this greatest power and bring us salvation, the technical expert – indeed, the medical expert.

Some readers have found a degree of absurdity in the type of *telos* reached by Eryximachus, and his eros of pumping, evacuation and repletion. Perhaps, as has been argued (Trivigno, 2017) he is not unaware of that absurdity. If there are gaps in this praise of eros, he says, Aristophanes will need to “top it up” (*anaplerosai*, 188e3). And

now comes the time for that. Eryximachus has brought his argument to what he understands as a *telos*, even if Aristophanes' hiccups have under his treatment only "come to a pause" (*pepausai*, 188e5).

Diotima on eros, telos and the good

Seeking a telos

In seeking for a *telos* to his account of eros, Eryximachus initially asserted (186a5) the significance of beauty. Yet beauty played no sustained role, as he proceeded to assert a breadth to eros which far transcended the human psyche. By 204d2 in Socrates' speech, Diotima and Socrates have agreed the central importance of beauty. Like Eryximachus, Diotima will seek answers which come to a *telos*. "Eros is for beautiful things", she asks Socrates, "but what if someone were to ask us, why is eros for beauties? [...] The person who feels eros, feels eros for beauties. Why does he desire them?" (204d2-5).

Socrates first attempt to answer this is that the lover seeks to be in relationship with them: "that they may come to be for him" (204d6). This answer avoids any clear note of possessiveness or acquisitiveness. Socrates does not use a verb of such as *echein* (to possess physically) or *ktasthai* (to acquire), but uses the possessive dative, "for him" (Costa, 2006, p. 41-43).

Diotima, saying that that answer still requires a follow-up question, and asks, using the same construction: "What will be for him, for whom the beautiful things become?" (204d7-8). That Socrates cannot answer. In response Diotima changes the ground: "Well, what if one were to make a change and enquire using "good" instead of 'beautiful'?" This leads to a similar line of questioning, ending "what will be for the person, for whom good things become?" (204e2-3). But now Socrates emerges with "good resources to answer: that he will flourish (*eudaimon estai*)" (204e6).

Whereas up to now, each statement of Socrates has been met with a "why" question from Diotima, she now says:

Yes. For it is in the getting of good things (*ktesei agathon*) that those who flourish find their flourishing. And it is no longer necessary to go on and ask, why does the person who desires to flourish desire that. Your answer seems to have completeness (*telos*) (205a1-3).

The word *ktesei* (205a1), meaning acquiring or getting, introduces a single unambiguous note of acquisition into Diotima's account of desire in this passage. This is significant because it reveals what the relevance of "using" (204e2) the good, rather than the beautiful. The sense in which beautiful things are desirable is different to the sense in which good things are. The beautiful one might find desirable because one wishes to look at it, or listen to it, while it remains obscure in what sense this is a personal or permanent relationship. The desirability of the good implies more clearly a fulfilment in personal and permanent relationship: this connection, and the relation to flourishing, is self-evident and indeed definitional. There is a contrast with aesthetic and aesthetic-*cum*-ethical judgements: if something appears beautiful, one question to ask might be whether it is also good, and if it promotes flourishing, and if not its beauty might seem illusory. "Using" the good is possible because of the close connection between goodness and beauty: "all desires are for the good in the guise of the beautiful" (Murdoch, 1998, p. 414). Yet on the other hand the "guise" itself is relevant.

The *telos* which Eryximachus rightly sought has been reached also by Socrates. However, this is a *telos* of a radically different kind, one reached through the the dialectical understanding of the relationship between eros and beauty. Eryximachus found completion in breadth, extending the account of eros far beyond human eros, and in wholesale subjection of human affairs to a conception of erotic balance, and so to the *techne* which achieves that. Socrates and Diotima, on the other hand, find completion in bringing the series of why questions to an end in a claim which is self-evident because it is definitional: it is self-evident why someone would desire that which they take to be good, especially when goodness is connected to flourishing.

The breadth of eros

Diotima also wishes to correct Eryximachus on the breadth of eros. For the next question about this wish for flourishing, and the possession of the good things needed for it, is this: “do you think that it is common (*koinon*) to all (*panton*) human beings, and that all (*pantas*) desire good things to be for them for ever (*aiei*)?” (205a5-7). Socrates agrees it is common to all (*koinon panton*, 205a8). This is in one way narrower than Eryximachus, since eros is once again restricted to human beings. But in one, paradoxically related, way it is vastly broader, for the desire is now described as “for ever”. Human beings have an open-ness to eternity not shared by other natural creatures.

This seems a feasible account of eros, if one is to follow the previous dialectical argument. But there is a problem, as Diotima now points out. That dialectic defines eros generically, as the desire for the eternal possession of good things needed for flourishing. But eros is in fact a word usually used more narrowly: “we say that some people feel eros, and some do not” (205b1-2).

The problem is that the above wish is shared by all human beings, but not all would be said to feel eros, in the usual sense: thus the account risks being too generic, risks going broader than eros as it would usually be understood. The answer, Diotima suggests, is that “separating off one part of eros, we give it a name, applying to it the name of the whole of eros. And for the other kinds we find other names” (205b6). Thus, there is a sense in which one could say that eros is for the good things needed for flourishing to be one’s own for ever. However, that sense is excessively generic, and a different sense to the usual one.

Poiesis, eros and the technai

The illustration taken to clarify this covers the same ground as the main illustration used by Eryximachus. The illustration is *poiesis*. This centrally includes music (205c6), recalling Eryximachus’ analogy between the *techne* of music, and the *techne* of medicine in

their roles of bringing harmony to things which have been of variance, including the discussion of Heraclitus and the lyre (187a3-b7). Then “metre” (205c6) recalls the alleged counter-example of rhythm (187b7-c1) and the discussion of “melodies and metres” at 187c3 – or, following the alternative manuscript reading, “melodies and rhythms” (Green 2015). For Diotima however the relevant analogy is between poetry and eros. Like eros in the generic sense, *poiesis* in the generic sense is of vast scope, for “all going from not-being into being is *poiesis*, and all productive (*ergasiai*) *technai* are *poieseis*; and the craftsmen are all *poetai*” (205b8-c2).

Against Eryximachus’ cosmic eros and vastly scoped *technai*, Diotima puts an eternal human eros, and vastly scoped *poiesis*. This puts two kinds of pressure on Eryximachus. Firstly, it is hard to get excited about the glories of *techne* conceived only as one way in which things go “from not-being to being”. Secondly, in the case of his *techne* specifically, one could ask what it is exactly that it causes to go from not-being into being. Thus, while Diotima nowhere mentions medicine specifically (Sheffield, 2006b, p. 38), she does here reinforce her anti-technocratic view.

Within *poiesis*, as within generic eros, the practitioners are not all

called poets, but have other names; only that portion of the art which is separated off from the rest, and is concerned with music and metre, is termed poetry, and they who possess poetry in this sense of the word are called poets (205c4-8)

This is analogous to the vast scope of generic eros, “the whole desire for good things and for being happy” (205d1).

There are multiple species of generic eros. One can turn oneself towards the good in many ways: “either through making money, or through looking after themselves physically, or through seeking wisdom” (205d3-4). But of these the word eros is not usually used, but only of those who travel in one way (205d6-8). The ordinary use of eros is therefore in a sense a case of “semantic confusion” (Sheffield, 2006a, p. 77).

The refutation of Eryximachus and Aristophanes

At this point Diotima, having corrected Eryximachus, appears to change her focus. At first sight, she turns to Aristophanes, in whose speech “a story (*logos*) is told, that lovers are those who seek the other half of themselves.” (205d10-e1) This view she certainly wishes to refute. For

my story (*logos*) is that they are seeking neither for the half of themselves, nor for the whole, unless the half or the whole be also a good. And they will cut off their own hands and feet and cast them away, if their state seems to them evil; unless they call what is their own and belongs to them “good”, and what belongs to another “evil”. For there is nothing which men love but the good (205e6-206a2).

Yet this statement is more dependent on the points Diotima has made against Eryximachus’ technocracy than might initially appear. Aristophanes did tell a truth well-expressed by Simone Weil (1957, p. 130): “that we are indeed incomplete beings who have been cleft by violence, fragments perpetually starving for their complementary part”. Aristophanes captured the way in which the human condition involves a longing for something missing. But, contrary to the imagery of his myth, “this complement cannot be in our own likeness” (Weil, 1957, p. 130).

The measure of what we seek, Diotima asserts, is not whether it is our “other half”, nor whether it is goal which gives us an illusory sense of technical control. Simply it is whether it is good. Martha Nussbaum (2001, p. 180) is right to suggest that Diotima here proposes a form of counter-*techné*. But (contrary to Nussbaum’s suggestion) Diotima is far from the desire to outbid Eryximachus with a superior form of technical control, via a calculus for hedonic maximisation or technique for commensurating optimisation of the potential satisfactions of competing desires. Rather, the Platonic philosophical *techné* she offers puts all desires to the question in the light of a notion of the good as transcending them, and providing a criterion for evaluating them. This constitutes a profound form of

anti-egoism, the notion of *ktesis* at 205a1 notwithstanding. The good becomes a criterion to which even the self must submit (Weil, 1957, p. 130; Murdoch, 1998, p. 425). One's desire for some good, to get or acquire some good, is always open to the question whether its goodness is only a false semblance. The limits which this appropriately puts on human self-centredness help explain how the best kinds of inter-personal love involve self-forgetfulness (Pickstock, 1998, p. 31).

The insight captured in the refutation of Aristophanes and Eryximachus provides the basis to restate with full confidence (206a13) a definition of eros as desire to possess the good. (206a4-12). This definition praises eros, but exalts "perfect good" (Murdoch, 1993, p. 343) still higher. If the good is above *techne*, and self, and indeed is the marker of eros itself, it also transcends the human lifespan, since one desires the good to be for oneself "for ever" (206a10).

Conclusion

When the speech of Eryximachus is set alongside this section of Socrates' speech, light is shed on the shortcomings of Eryximachus' technocratic approach. The doctor develops an account of eros of extraordinary breath and ambition. This has the potential to elevate *techne*, including his own *techne*, and himself as technical expert. These all seem likely to be lifted like boats on, so to speak, a rising tide of eros.

Yet Eryximachus' account ends up growing not so much cosmically, but in fact comically, broad. It fails to give a central role to beauty or to the good. To seek a *telos* through exhaustive breadth would require a totalising level of exhaustiveness, which can never quite be achieved. Hence the text discloses something significant in the hint that for all his intentions to reach a *telos* he fails, and his praise of eros in fact reaches no more than a pause – and could only ever reach a pause.

This section of Socrates' speech is best read as a response to the challenges laid down by Eryximachus – and also, in its concluding section, by Aristophanes. An account is needed of how beauty and the good relate to eros, an account which achieves a *telos*. Only rigorous dialectic and the definition of eros as desire to possess the good eternally and to flourish can achieve this. This definition opens the way for the priestess to go on to discuss the *praxis* and specific work of love from 206b2. The clarification of the proper role of *techné* has shown that the technocrat's hope to displace the priestess is a vain one.

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Submitted in 26/01/2019 and accepted for publication 05/10/2019



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