Kelly Almeida

Symposium Reflection

In *Symposium* by Plato, most of the speeches about love given by a group of philosophers offered abstract reasoning and mythological examples, making their discussions difficult to digest. I will argue that Alcibiades’ speech in *Symposium* by Plato served as a real-life example and a confirmation of many of the previous points stated in the discussion, especially those stated by Socrates.

In the book, a group of intellectuals discuss their respective views on love over drinks. They go around the room, each giving a speech, and the last two (Agathon and Socrates) are thought to be the the best. Agathon discussed the god of Love, remarking that Love is young, sensitive, and brings peace to all the gods. Socrates then responds by questioning Agathon and proceeding with Diotima’s speech, which expresses the many characteristics of love through thorough questioning. When Alcibiades shows up very drunk after Socrates’ speech and gives a speech of his own, he speaks largely about Socrates and his relationship with him. In their relationship, he was not able to seduce Socrates, despite Alcibiades being a young, good looking person, and Socrates’ wisdom then made Alcibiades want to seduce Socrates (216D-219E).

As Socrates relayed the speech of Diotima, it is not always clear what the point of the speech was due to the abstract nature of the material and the difficulty of her language. I think that Socrates’ and Alcibiades’ relationship, as described by a very drunken Alcibiades, uses simpler language that does not directly or obviously relate to Diotima’s speech, but compliments it with his description of Socrates. His description adds an example that is easily relatable to for the readers and the philosophers.

I believe that Alcibiades description of Socrates relates to the description of Love in Diotima/Socrates’ speech, in that Love is neither mortal or immortal, it is a spirit, which serves as a messenger from mortals to immortals (202D-202E). Alcibiades not only compares Socrates to a god (215B), and says that he can’t be compared to any humans (221D), but also remarks that no matter how much he drinks, Socrates never gets drunk (214A). This, and the fact that he stayed up all night and went about his day normally and has braved the cold with minimal clothing (220B), makes him seem like something a greater than a mortal, but not quite immortal. In class, we also spoke about whether Diotima is even a real person. If she is not, it makes Socrates appear to be a spirit even more, since he would be passing a message from Diotima (not quite a god, but some sort of figure from above), to those at the dinner (mortals).

Diotima also suggests that Love is in love with wisdom, and seeks wisdom (204E). According to Alcibiades, Socrates is always seeking wisdom, always standing outside and wandering off, trying to find a solution to a problem and think everything through, in order to ultimately find wisdom in it (220C). Diotima also remarks that humans seek the virtue of honor, only for hope of immortality (208C-E). However, Alcibiades recalls a time when he and Socrates were in battle together and Socrates saved his life. Alcibiades told them that Socrates really deserved the decoration, but when Alcibiades received it anyways, Socrates was happy that they gave it to him (220D-E). It could be argued that he was only being brave for the honor, and could have been faking happiness for Alcibiades, but I think that this action just went along with his temperate nature, as Alcibiades said (216D, 220A).

Socrates seems to all of his fellow philosophers just a wise man and great philosopher, however, Alcibiades, seeing him in the context of love, was able to see deeper into him. When he makes his speech, Alcibiades expresses all of the information, and unintentionally compliments previous speeches.

Works Cited

Plato. *Symposium*. Translated by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, Hackett Publishing Company, 1989.