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Reflection on Plato's *Symposium*

Love is beautiful. Love is forever young. Love possesses a variety of traits according to the character speeches of Plato's *Symposium*. However, there is a particular character whose views on Love are the least compelling due continuous contradiction: Agathon.

Prompted by the inquiries of Socrates in "Socrates Questions Agathon," Agathon's views are expanded upon. In his eyes, Love "loves just what he needs and does not have (43)."

On a broader spectrum, one loves what they desire, and desires that of which they lack (43).

Therefore, one would not love or desire what they already *have*, because they love *only* what they desire, and desire *only* what they *lack* (42-43). For example, a strong person would not love or desire strength, for they would already possess it, just as a tall person would supposedly not love or desire height, since they, too, already possess it (42)

Agathon was famous for his own personal beauty and desirability (32). This is why Agathon's speech on Love emphasizes the god's beauty and desires, for in his own words, "like is always drawn to like (32)." The beautiful Agathon would be drawn towards imagining the god, Love, as being beautiful as well because of the similarity that lies in their shared beauty (32).

However, this is where Agathon begins to contradict himself. Of course, being drawn to something is a big step away from *loving* something— but it is still a definite stone on the path towards such, for we love what we are drawn to. So, if Agathon is drawn towards the beautiful, but is beautiful himself, is he not able to love such a thing? According to him, this is a rational conclusion. If you love something then it is beautiful, for "love is not drawn to ugliness (36)."

However, this would mean that Agathon is either lacking in beauty, or lacks desire for beautiful

people. Yet, it is considered a fact that Agathon was beautiful (see footnote #30, page 32). It may also be considered a fact that he loves beautiful people or objects because he is drawn to Love, who is beautiful (as is maintained throughout Agathon's speech). Therefore, Agathon neither lacks beauty nor the desire and love of beautiful things... Which rebuts his claims of loving only what one lacks.

This argument does, of course, raise valid objections. For one, as was mentioned beforehand, loving something and being drawn towards something are two separate ideals altogether. One may be drawn to something without developing a love for it; however, this is a difficult statement, for one must be drawn to something in order to eventually love it, and vice versa. Another objection may come to argue that, after hearing Socrates' arguments against Agathon's views, Agathon admits to having fault in his speech, saying, "It turns out, Socrates, I didn't know what I was talking about in that speech (43)." This admittance, however, does nothing to dispute the original thesis of Agathon's speech as being the least compelling of all the characters' speeches throughout *Symposium*— rather, the character's admittance strengthens the thesis proposed. Agathon acknowledges and realizes that his speech is contradictory in nature, and concedes, making his viewpoint seem even less compelling in its validity. An audience would not likely be influenced by a speaker who claims that he or she does not know the truth to the topic at hand, and would therefore not find the speaker compelling in any way. This is true for Agathon as a speaker.

Agathon's speech and views, while elegantly worded and expressed, are not compelling in their logic. His words contradict themselves throughout both his speech and the questions that

Socrates asks of him. His theories on the behavior of Love also counter his beliefs on the love of the god, Love.

Works Cited

Plato, Alexander Nehamas & Paul Woodruff. *Symposium*. Hackett, 1989.