

"BECOMING IMMORTAL" IN PLATO'S *SYMPOSIUM**

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Immortality is a recurrent subject in Plato, but no reference to it is more perplexing than that found in the last sentence of Diotima's speech as reported by Socrates in the *Symposium*. This sentence concludes her portrayal of the philosophic life interpreted as an expression of eros, and here at the end she holds out to the philosopher a promise of immortality. Her use of the word "immortal" is dramatically pointed, and Socrates follows it with an appeal to his companions that is reminiscent of his reaction to accounts of the afterlife in *Republic*, *Gorgias*, and *Phaedo*.¹ But Diotima has not spoken of the afterlife, apart from whatever allusion to it may be contained in the word "immortal." It is this silence and the doubtful implications of that word in the *Symposium* which create the perplexity.

At 207d1 ff. Diotima said that mortal nature can be immortal only through *γένεσις*, by always leaving behind something new to replace the old. She exemplified this by the succession of individuals within animal species, by the regeneration of parts of the body and states of mind, and

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The following works, which are mentioned more than once in the notes, are cited there by author alone or by author and short title: R. S. Bluck trans., *Plato's Phaedo* (London 1955); R. G. Bury ed., *The Symposium of Plato*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge 1932); K. J. Dover, "The Date of Plato's *Symposium*," *Phronesis* 10 (1965) 2-20; K. J. Dover ed., *Plato: Symposium* (Cambridge 1980); W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. 4: *Plato, the Man and His Dialogues: Earlier Period* (Cambridge 1975); R. Hackforth, "Immortality in Plato's *Symposium*," *CR* 64 (1950) 43-45; R. Hackforth trans., *Plato's Phaedo* (Cambridge 1952); Ferdinand Horn, *Platonstudien* (Vienna 1893); Walther Kranz, "Diotima von Mantinea," *Hermes* 61 (1926) 437-47; J. V. Luce, "Immortality in Plato's *Symposium*: A Reply," *CR* 2 (1952) 137-41; J. S. Morrison, "Four Notes on Plato's *Symposium*," *CQ* n.s. 14 (1964) 42-55; G. J. de Vries, "Mystery Terminology in Aristophanes and Plato," *Mnemosyne* ser. 4, 26 (1973) 1-8; U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Platon*, 2 vols., 2nd ed (Berlin 1920); Jürgen Wippert, "Eros und Unsterblichkeit in der Diotima-Rede des Symposions," *Synusia. Festgabe für W. Schadewaldt*, edd. H. Flashar, K. Gaiser (Pfullingen 1965) 123-59.

¹ See note 35 below.

later by other activities that vary according to whether the person begetting offspring is pregnant (as her paradoxical metaphor has it) in body or in soul. The former beget children. The latter, among whom are poets and lawgivers, educate others and instill virtue, securing for themselves glory after death. All achieve a kind of immortality. Among those pregnant in soul the philosopher is preeminent because he reaches the vision of absolute Beauty. In the presence of it he will beget true virtue, come to be loved by the gods, and become, if any man does, immortal (212a).

When this last word occurs at the end of Diotima's speech it is hard not to feel bound to take it in the sense already explained in that speech, rather than in a sense imported from another dialogue, such as the *Phaedo*. We might therefore feel obliged to say that the philosopher, like the poet and the lawgiver, lives on only in his good influence and his fame. Yet it has often been remarked how difficult it is to maintain this conclusion and continue to think of Plato as a consistent or even as a steadily evolving thinker. For one thing, the date of the *Symposium* is generally taken to fall not before but between dialogues which promote a notion of immortality as survival of the soul in a life beyond death.²

The solutions that have been proposed follow three main lines. They are: (i) that Plato does not mean us to accept what Diotima says; (ii) that when he wrote the *Symposium* he did not believe that the soul is literally immortal; and (iii) that, in spite of appearances, what Diotima says is at least consistent with that belief and at best implies or asserts it. I will consider them in that order.

In spite of Socrates' deference to her, it is possible to make a case against Diotima's authority. This is sometimes done by claiming that Socrates' reaction to her within the dramatized account of their conversation is pointedly reserved and cautious. It is true that only in the first stages of her argument does he answer her in a way to indicate understanding and agreement. After 206a13 he substitutes for assent a variety of expressions that convey incomprehension and wonder.³ His apparent tribute at 208b8, ὦ σοφωτάτη Διοτίμα, has ironic parallels,⁴ and after this he is completely silent until her monologue ends at 212a7. It is arguably significant that his last clear statement of assent precedes her

² Leaving out of account the *Phaedo*, which is sometimes put before the *Symposium* and sometimes after it, we need only consider the earlier passage at *Meno* 81a-c and the later one at *Rep.* 608d. For Morrison's challenge to the usual dating of the *Symposium* see note 19 below. A conspectus of some views on relative dates can be found in David Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, 2nd ed. (Oxford 1953) 1-10.

³ Wilamowitz (2.170) says that Socrates' reaction is one of doubt. See 206b9-10, e4, 207c2, 208b7-9. εἶν (206e6) is a word that can express or disguise more than one attitude (cf. *Rep.* 350e3).

⁴ ὦ σοφώτατε Θρασύμαχε (*Rep.* 339e) and ὦ σοφώτατε σύ (Callicles to Socrates at *Gorgias* 495d).

development of the term "immortality" after 207a in the sense noted above. She seems equally detached in her attitude to Socrates, except that she is condescending, whereas he is respectfully non-committal. She laughs at his obtuseness in supposing that Eros is a great god (202b10). She says at 204b1 that what is not clear to Socrates would be clear even to a child. Finally, she suggests at 210a2 that the last and most important part of her doctrine of immortality may well be beyond his capacity to understand. "But try to follow, if you can."

The models for complacency and condescension elsewhere in Plato are the great sophists.⁵ It is to the sophists that Socrates compares Diotima at the beginning of a section of her speech in which the comparison seems particularly relevant (208c1). In it she will say that the greatest and noblest form of wisdom (φρόνησις) is the management of cities and households; in adding that those who are pregnant in soul teach this she makes for them the same claim that the Platonic Protagoras makes for himself.⁶ Her placement of early poets and lawgivers in the line of teachers of virtue is no less Protagorean.⁷ Finally, love of honor, the motive of Diotima's teacher of virtue, is more than once attributed to the sophists by Plato, sometimes by making them candidly acknowledge their pride in their reputations.⁸

If one could maintain this line of argument, the difficulty posed by Diotima's treatment of immortality might be solved by treating it as a brilliant display piece, filled with fragments of noble ideas, but fundamentally not Platonic, because it offered no reward beyond death but the survival of one's good reputation. I do not think, however, that in the end this interpretation can be defended. Socrates says at 198d-199b that what will distinguish him from the five earlier speakers is that he will speak the truth rather than put on a display of extravagant praise. With some irony he begs the indulgence of Phaedrus for taking this eccentric approach. Only after he has gained it does he go on to ask permission to examine Agathon first. Therefore it is his monologue which will tell the truth, and this will be almost entirely a report of what Diotima said.⁹ At

⁵ See *Prot.* 317c ff., 318a6 ff., 320c2; *Gorg.* 448a1 ff., 460a3 ff.; *Hipp. Minor* 363c7 ff., 364a7 ff.

⁶ τὸ δὲ μάθημά ἐστιν εὐβουλία περὶ τῶν οἰκείων . . . καὶ περὶ τῶν τῆς πόλεως . . . (*Prot.* 318e5 ff.).

⁷ *Symp.* 209c7-e4. Cf. *Prot.* 316d7 ff., 326d6. A point of contrast is that Diotima is willing to give high rank to inventors in the arts, whereas Protagoras disparages instruction in these subjects (*Prot.* 318d9 ff.). But the example of Hippias shows that sophistic attitudes were not uniform on this matter. Protagoras himself may only be asserting an order of precedence and scoring a point against a rival.

⁸ *Prot.* 335a4-8, *Hipp. Minor* 363c7-364a9. Cf. *Charm.* 162c2, where honor is Critias' motive. See Wilamowitz 2.174.

⁹ Since the phrase used is "the truth about Eros" (199b3; cf. 198d3-4), there seems no possibility of taking "truth" in the trivial sense of "what Diotima actually said."

the end of this report Socrates will say *πέπεισμαι δ' ἐγώ*. It is true that belief is not knowledge, but it is the strongest form of assent open to Socrates, who represents himself as not fully up to the level of Diotima's argument. *πέπεισμαι* should therefore cancel any suspicion that Socrates' resort to expressions of astonishment and then to silence near the end of Diotima's speech were meant to indicate doubt or rejection.¹⁰ Socrates' endorsement is made easier to understand by the fact that some of Diotima's views are recognizably Platonic. The distinction she makes between wisdom and right opinion (202a) is consistent with what is said on that subject at *Meno* 97 ff. The special use of *ἀμαθία* to mean the intellectual inertia of the self-satisfied (204a) parallels its use at *Sophist* 229c and is reflected throughout the dialogues in Plato's dramatic conception of figures like Hippias, Euthyphro, and Callicles. Finally, it seems impossible not to recognize in Diotima's description of the highest object of contemplation (211b1) a Platonic Form, presented in language that would not be out of place in the *Phaedo*. All this tells against any attempt to distinguish her views sharply from those of the Platonic Socrates, but it still leaves some obstacles for anyone wishing to reconcile them.

Some of these obstacles are concentrated in the penultimate section of her speech (208c1–209e4), to which the term "sophistic" is most plausibly attached. Here the motive of virtuous action is fame: the highest wisdom is expressed in private and civic administration; and the educators of greatest note are poets and lawgivers. It is tempting to treat these doctrines as definitive because in their own context they are put forward without qualification. But it is also clear that all of them are superseded and left behind after the emphatic transition to what Diotima calls *τὰ ἐποπτικά* at 210a1. The theme of fame, which pervades 208c1–209e4 and at one point is said to be a universal motive, is simply dropped after that transition;¹¹ the claim that administrative wisdom is the greatest and noblest type will not easily survive the estimate shortly

¹⁰ See Wilamowitz 2.170. His arguments are met by Kranz 438–39. H. Neumann, "Diotima's Concept of Love," *AJP* 86 (1965) 58, appears to say that *πέπεισμαι* only shows that Socrates did not understand what Diotima was driving at. This comes near the end of a long argument purporting to show that the views of Diotima and those of the Platonic Socrates are radically different. Various misconceptions assist this conclusion, including the notion that she presents absolute Beauty as a tool in the arrogant pursuit of personal fame (45, 47–48, 50). Against this see below, note 11.

¹¹ Fame is a universal motive at 208d7–8. See also 208c5–6, d5–6, 209d3, d6, e3. But fame is then replaced by a new goal at 210a1 (*τὰ δὲ τέλεια καὶ ἐποπτικά, ὧν ἕνεκα* . . .). Consequently, there is no implication that Diotima regards *φιλοτιμία*, the distinctive mark of the first degenerate polity in the *Republic* (545b), as the motive of the philosopher. In Alcibiades' speech too, *φιλοτιμία* appears implicitly as an alternative and an impediment to philosophy, in the remark that what drew him away from Socrates was *τιμῆ* (216b5).

to be placed on knowledge of absolute Beauty; and the poets and lawgivers will yield precedence to the philosopher. When the begetting of "true virtue" is explicitly reserved at 212a2–3 to the philosopher in the presence of absolute Beauty (*ἐνταῦθα . . . μοναχοῦ*) and a contrast is drawn with those who beget mere *εἰδῶλα* of virtue, the latter must include those who were given highest rank in the earlier section. This contrast of levels of virtue is not unique to the *Symposium*. The transition at 210a1 marks the passage from what Plato elsewhere calls "demotic virtue" to philosophic virtue. The peculiarity of Diotima's account of demotic virtue is that until 209e5 she describes it in language that does not suggest its inferior status.¹² This is a difficulty that can be resolved only by giving due weight to the form of Diotima's speech, which is one of gradual disclosure in the manner of an initiation into mysteries. The section that ends at 209e4 is a conclusion with which most initiates would have to rest content, and the goal of the philosopher is a secret of which they are unworthy and Socrates himself scarcely worthy (210a2). Within the bounds of such a literary convention, the qualifications normally to be expected in a description of demotic virtue might well be omitted as premature references to a subject meant for the ears of a more select group. There is further evidence of Diotima's use of such an artifice in her successive statements about immortality. A fuller discussion of this topic and of the way in which her office of mystagogue influences her exposition will be found below.

Another kind of literary convention, irony, accounts for the fact that Diotima treats Socrates like a fool. There can be no doubt that Socrates is meant to be understood as the author of her speech. No one chaffs him

¹² The phrase *δημοτικὴ* (or *πολιτικὴ*) *ἀρετὴ* is used in several Platonic passages to identify a kind of virtue that is estimable to a degree but limited, since knowledge is not part of it. It is the virtue of unphilosophic men in well-ordered states. At *Phaedo* 82ab those who practice *δημοτικὴν καὶ πολιτικὴν ἀρετὴν* are ranked beneath philosophers, though they are said to call their virtue *σωφροσύνην τε καὶ δικαιοσύνην*. The latter phrase turns up again at *Rep.* 500d, where Socrates is once more speaking of "demotic" virtue, this time as something imposed by the ruler on his subjects. It is therefore worth noting that Diotima uses *σωφροσύνην τε καὶ δικαιοσύνην* at *Symp.* 209a7–8 to identify the virtue praised most highly in this section of her speech, viz. keeping cities and households in good order. (Cf. *Meno* 73ab, where city and household management requires *σωφροσύνην* and *δικαιοσύνην*.) We may note on the other hand that a poor choice of life is made in the Myth of Er (*Rep.* 619c) by a man who has lived in such a well-ordered state but who shares in virtue without philosophy, and that *πολιτικὴ* is used as a limiting term at *Rep.* 430c in describing courage of an inferior type. The language Plato uses of unphilosophic virtue varies according to the rhetorical needs of different passages. Contrast in this respect *Phaedo* 68d11–e3 and 82b. Only in the *Symposium* does the immediate context place no restriction on its value. The language of the transition at 210a, however, will clearly imply that this virtue imparted by poets and lawgivers is of an inferior kind. So will the use of *εἰδῶλον* at 212a4, a term applied to a rudimentary type of justice at *Rep.* 443c.

at the end for passing off a second-hand product. Instead, Aristophanes calls attention to an allusion that Diotima, i.e., Socrates, made to his own speech.¹³ The clearest sign, however, that Socrates is indulging in artfully transparent pretense rather than in strictly truthful narrative is the way in which Diotima's questioning of him continues his own questioning of Agathon. This continuity is made to depend on an alleged coincidence between the two conversations (201e3 ff.). It also extends further than the stitching of a neat seam. Agathon's division of the topic into the nature of Eros and the works of Eros was commended by Socrates at 199c5. It is now reintroduced as the program for Diotima's contribution (201e1) and becomes recognizable in the order in which she deals with the parts of her topic.¹⁴ Socrates has also lightened this impromptu composition by casting himself in the role of the dullard. After courteously sharing the discredit of Agathon's misguided answers (201e3-4), he goes on to play the part of the undiscerning respondent to Diotima's questions, and when the argument grows novel and complicated contributes only expressions of amazement and incomprehension.¹⁵ In this ironically conceived narrative, the failure of Socrates the disciple of Diotima to assent to the later parts of her teaching, or even to say that he understands them, is a form of urbane self-disparagement on the part of Socrates the narrator. So is the amused disdain of Diotima for her slow-witted partner.¹⁶

The verdict to which all this evidence points is that the arguments developed by Diotima are meant to be attributed to the Platonic Socrates, but that irony and an assumed convention of mystic revelation have influenced their expression. This leaves open the second possibility, that when Plato wrote the *Symposium* he meant to attribute to Socrates a disbelief in the immortality of the soul because he himself had not yet arrived at that doctrine or had discarded it. This hypothesis is made difficult to defend by the close connection in several dialogues between the immortality of the soul and the Theory of Forms. The last part of Diotima's speech, as already noted, assumes the existence of Forms, and

by the terms of the *Phaedo* such an assumption would be held to entail both the pre-existence of the soul and its immortality.¹⁷ The Forms and the pre-existent soul are also probably to be seen as associated in the *Meno*, though this is doubted by some scholars. They are certainly associated in the *Phaedrus*.¹⁸ No easily tenable hypothesis has been found to explain how Plato might have come to write a dialogue that rejected literal immortality but maintained the existence of Forms. Morrison has argued that the *Symposium* belongs to an early period of Plato's career when he had not yet been convinced, under the influence of Pythagoreanism, of the immortality of the soul or seen a connection between this doctrine and the Forms.¹⁹ He therefore dates the *Symposium* earlier than the *Meno*, *Gorgias*, and *Phaedo*. Unfortunately, this will not produce an entirely straight line of development. The *Crito*, though it does not explicitly teach immortality, presupposes an after-life and a day of judgment; and in the *Apology*, for all his well-known refusal to say whether the claims about immortality are true, Socrates tilts the rhetorical balance in favor of an affirmative answer by developing the latter at greater length and by giving it the final position before his brief conclusion.²⁰ If the *Symposium* follows even these dialogues and denies immortality, it will still represent a striking change of mind. There is, in any case, an impediment to an early dating in the anachronism at 193a1-3, which points to a date after 385/4.²¹ Hackforth, rather than contest the usual dating, supposed instead that the *Symposium* shows a relapse by Plato into temporary scepticism. On this view, the Plato of the *Symposium* had come to doubt the final argument of the *Phaedo* and had not yet developed the other arguments adduced in the *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, and *Laws*. The very complication of this hypothesis is an argument against it. It assumes the discarding of two doctrines, immortality and anamnesis, and the later resumption of both, without any loss in the interval of the Theory of Forms, which had served in the *Phaedo* as the keystone of both.²² Hackforth was conscious of the implausibility of such a development but concluded that it must be accepted in the

¹³ At 212c5-6, referring to 191a6 and 205d10.

¹⁴ Note the transition at 204c8 (ροιοῦτος ὢν ὁ "Ἔρως τίνα χρείαν ἔχει τοῖς ἀνθρώποις;). See Kranz 440.

¹⁵ This imaginary Socrates thinks that what is not beautiful must be ugly (202a1), that a suitable way to argue in favor of something is to say "But everybody believes it" (202b6-7), and even after three examples of something intermediate (202a3, b4, d11) is mystified, to Diotima's annoyance, by the reappearance of one (204a8-b2). After 206a13 his comments show that he ceases altogether to follow the thread of argument. His tone, moreover, is one not of scepticism but of naive amazement (see 206b9, 208b7).

¹⁶ Among the themes that have taken an unusual form because Diotima rather than Socrates is the imagined speaker is the intellectual relation between ἐραστῆς and ἐράμενος. The former is no self-effacing midwife (see *Theaet.* 149a ff.) but the true getter of their discourse (*Symp.* 210a7-8).

¹⁷ *Phaedo* 76de, 100b. See Luce 139-40.

¹⁸ R. S. Bluck ed., *Plato's Meno* (Cambridge 1961) 46-47. For another view of the *Meno* see J. M. Rist, "Plato's 'Earlier Theory of Forms,'" *Phoenix* 29 (1975) 356. The *Phaedrus* passage is 247c3 ff.

¹⁹ Morrison 42-46.

²⁰ *Crito* 54b4-8, c6-7; *Apol.* 40c4-41c7.

²¹ So Dover, "The Date of Plato's *Symposium*," 2-9. He argues against H. B. Mattingly, "The Date of Plato's *Symposium*," *Phronesis* 3 (1958) 31-39, and against Morrison.

²² Hackforth, "Immortality," 43-45. In his earlier study of the problem, Horn 276-79 had argued that Diotima's theory of immortality represents not a passing scepticism but an unsuccessful experiment. In it Plato allegedly remains committed to his earlier doctrine of the soul's survival but develops arguments which implicitly undermine it and are for this reason later abandoned.

face of what he regarded as Diotima's clear statements denying immortality in the literal sense.

The hypothesis that Plato changed his mind twice cannot, therefore, strictly be ruled out without a review of those statements in their context. This review will allow us to consider the third possible solution to the problem, viz., that Diotima intends no denial of the soul's immortality. The solution proposed will be approached in two stages. In the first it will be argued that the topic of the immortality of the soul is, strictly speaking, avoided in what Diotima says rather than asserted or denied. In the second, a reason for its avoidance will be put forward, one which contains a reference to the status of Diotima and to the form she gives to her instruction of Socrates.

The first thing to be said about Diotima's argument is that the topic of immortality (to be distinguished from the narrower topic of the immortality of the soul) is extremely prominent in it. It is one of three related conceptions that shape her discourse from beginning to end: *ἔρως*, *τὸ καλόν*, and *ἀθανασία*. The first two, with a foreshadowing of the third, are already present in Socrates' examination of Agathon (199c-201c). This section, which constitutes an introduction to Diotima's instruction of Socrates, establishes the following series of propositions:

Eros has an object (199d1 ff.), which he desires (200a2 ff.) and does not possess (200a5 ff.). In cases where someone seems to possess what he desires, the object of desire is not the object possessed but rather its continued possession (200b4-e1). Thus *ἐπιθυμῶ τῶν παρόντων* is no more than an inexact way of saying *βούλομαι τὰ νῦν παρόντα καὶ εἰς τὸν ἔπειτα χρόνον παρέιναι* (200d3-6). Eros has beauty for its object and therefore does not possess it (201a2-b4). Lacking *τὸ κάλλος* and *τὰ καλά*, he also lacks *τὰ ἀγαθὰ* (201c4-5).

For our purposes, the significant conclusion here is that one kind of object for Eros is the continued possession in the future of something already possessed. This has not been extended to mean everlasting possession, since no appropriate object has been named. Socrates has mentioned only bigness, speed, strength, health, and wealth.

In Diotima's questioning of Socrates, this thread of argument is carried forward in the section beginning at 204c8, where Socrates asks her to pass from the nature of Eros to his functions. What we then hear is that the lover desires to acquire *τὰ καλά* (204d7) or, in other words, *τὰ ἀγαθὰ* (204e4).²³ To possess these is happiness (204e6-7), and therefore

²³ The transition from *μῦθος* to *λόγος*, in which the subject changes from "Eros, the daemon, to *ἔρως*, the emotion, or *ὁ ἔρως*, the agent, is made in the casual phrase *ὦδε δὲ σαφέστερον* (204d5). Protagoras was more emphatic in making a similar transition at *Prot.* 324d6-7. From this point, therefore, my discussion will generally refer to "eros" (with lower case e). When they are speaking of "Eros, the daemon, Socrates and Diotima adopt the language of myth, with its license of personification, which allows them to say

eros is all desire for the good and for happiness (205d1-3). During this stage in the argument the word eros has been explicitly broadened beyond the erotic to include all human activities, but the process of refining the explanation is not yet complete. It is now said that eros has for its object the *eternal* possession for oneself of what is good (*ἔστιν ἄρα συλλήβδην, ἔφη, ὁ ἔρως τοῦ τὸ ἀγαθὸν αὐτῷ εἶναι ἀεί*, 206a11-12).

Until 206a the argument contains nothing to disconcert any reader of the *Phaedo*. It might have continued in a straight line to the conclusion that man desires the eternal possession of what is most truly good, and what is therefore ideal and imperishable, with that part of him which alone can possess it, his soul. Instead, the argument turns aside to acknowledge that for the mortal animal (the context shows that the term is meant to include man) the way to immortality is pregnancy and generation (206c7-8). The introduction of these terms produces still another interpretation of eros, which is now said to be the desire of generation and birth in the beautiful (206e5). This and the earlier statement that eros is the desire for the eternal possession of the good lead Diotima to the conclusion that eros has a double object: that which is good and immortality (206e8-207e4).

The next several pages leading to Diotima's conclusion are an almost uninterrupted monologue falling into three stages, with transitions at 208c1 and 209e5. In the course of it she explains that at all levels of conscious life, among animals and men, and in the special group of men called philosophers, the presence of eros as already defined can be detected. In the first two parts of this tripartite section it is clear that the explanation of eros reached earlier is being justified only in a much attenuated sense, and that certain terms are not being given full value. The object of eros, it was said, is the everlasting (*ἀεί*) possession of the good for oneself (*αὐτῷ*) and immortality (*ἀθανασία*). Now we are told, in 207ab, that animals are said to display eros when they beget offspring, rear them, and die on their behalf. It is apparent that the notion of self has been extended here to include one's family and perhaps one's species. A similar enlargement of the idea can be detected in the second

"Eros *ἔρα* (200a), "Eros is not *καλός* (201b) and "Eros is *τὸ ἔρως* (204c). This is the convention also followed by Agathon in saying that "Eros is *καλός* and by Sophocles in writing of "Eros at *Antigone* 781 ff. It is naturally followed by Socrates and then by Diotima until they have settled the issue that Agathon raised: How shall we describe the personified "Eros, the figure of myth? When this question is disposed of, at 204c6, a less poetic way of speaking of lovers and their emotions is adopted. In constructing this mythical Eros, Socrates has at times spoken of him in the same breath as a person and a desire (e.g., at 199d1-2, e6-7, 200a2-3, 201a9-10); in fact, he carries his point against Agathon by doing this. Such logical sleight of hand deserves more indulgence in this context than Dover is prepared to give it (see ed. *Symp.*, commentary to 201b1 ff.). This is elenchus, but it is also mythmaking. Stripped of its wit the argument says that all lovers are in need and that a mythical portrait of Love ought to remind us of this.

part of this section, at 208de, where Diotima speaks of men seeking immortality and happiness by acts of self-sacrifice or by begetting children. She relies, to be sure, on the common belief that a man's interests survive his death and are represented both by his children and by what posterity thinks of him. Nevertheless, a word that was introduced ostensibly in the strict and normal sense is now justified by being used in a loose and extended sense. If *ἀνθρώπος* is not given quite full value, even greater liberties are taken with the uncompromising term *ἀεί*. In Platonic language the word is associated with the gods and with the eternal Forms, *τὰ ἀεί ὄντα*.²⁴ Its use cannot strictly be justified by Diotima's references to fame or children (208c1–209e4), and even less by the limited survival of flesh, blood, and memory in the individual (207d4–208a7). In all these cases the implicit reference back to *ἀεί* is defensible only if we take it to mean "for a long time." She in fact indicates by certain turns of phrase that the object of eros is realized only imperfectly in the examples of "immortality" given in 207a5–209e5. These include *κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν* (207d1) and *ὡς οἴονται* (208e4).²⁵ If Diotima will not allow that any man is ever immortal in the literal sense, then the conclusion cannot be escaped that eros in no case achieves its proper object, the everlasting possession of the good for oneself. The gods possess that object, but eros is not one of their attributes, since one cannot desire what one has.²⁶ Animals and men display eros, but none of them possesses the desired object "forever" or in any but the loosest sense of the phrase "for oneself." A reader may well ask whether Plato means to give Diotima an argument in which expectations will continue to be so badly disappointed. It should be emphasized that these expectations arise not from a reading of the *Phaedo* but from the terms chosen by Diotima in

²⁴ See *Phaedo* 79d, *Symp.* 211a1, b1.

²⁵ At 208c6, d5, d7, and 209d3 *ἀθάνατον* is used without qualification, but these seem to be examples of poetic hyperbole of a traditional kind. The poetic status of the first two is indicated by their pronounced dactylic rhythm. Bury cites parallels from Tyrtaeus, Theognis, and Simonides.

²⁶ Since Socrates' way of speaking is partly *μῦθος* and partly *λόγος*, and since his subject is both Eros and eros, the inference that eros is not an attribute of the gods has to be drawn from statements not all of which are on a logical footing with it (see note 23 above). In Socrates' elenchus of Agathon, the terms *ἐπιθυμεί* and *ἐρᾷ* appear to be used as synonyms (200a5–6), and *τὸ ἐπιθυμῆναι* is then said to be evidence of deficiency (200a8–b2). We are later invited to assume, at 201e6, that these and other points made by Socrates against Agathon have been learned from Diotima. Diotima then says that Eros cannot be a god because he desires (*ἐπιθυμῆναι*) what is good and beautiful and therefore lacks it, whereas the gods do not lack these things (202d1–7). In regard to the specific good *σοφία*, she says, "No god φιλοσοφεί or desires (*ἐπιθυμῆναι*) to become wise, for he is wise" (204a1–2). It follows from 200ab and 202d5–6 taken together that no god ἐρᾷ. The conclusion actually reached at 202d7 takes the form of saying that Eros is not a god, since the issue at this point is the nature of Eros. Then 204a gives one example of the gods' lack of desire, or eros.

the first stages of her own exposition. It remains to inquire whether they are meant to be satisfied by the last of the three stages of her explanation and particularly by her final words.

When Diotima in these final words speaks of how the philosopher may become "immortal," it can be argued that this word has already been severely denatured by some statements made four or five pages earlier. The first is found at 207d1–3, where she describes the instinct of animals for reproduction and the protection of their young. Socrates is told not to wonder about the cause of this: *ἐνταῦθα γὰρ τὸν αὐτὸν ἐκεῖνον λόγον ἢ θνητῆ φύσις ζητεῖ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν ἀεὶ τε εἶναι καὶ ἀθάνατος. δύναται δὲ ταύτη μόνον, τῇ γενέσει . . .* A few lines later, with reference to the constant replacement of the old by the new in the human body and in the states of the human soul, she says *τούτῳ γὰρ τῷ τρόπῳ πᾶν τὸ θνητὸν σφύζεται* (208a7) and *ταύτη τῇ μηχανῇ . . . θνητὸν ἀθανασίας μετέχει, καὶ σῶμα καὶ τᾶλλα πάντα* (208b2–4). If the terms *ἢ θνητῆ φύσις* and *πᾶν τὸ θνητὸν* are taken to mean "man" or "mortal creatures," as they sometimes are,²⁷ these statements will appear to preclude the immortality of the soul in the sense in which it is defended in the *Phaedo*. Dover, however, has argued convincingly that the choice of language shows rather that Diotima wishes to avoid raising this issue.²⁸ The phrases quoted do refer to both men and animals, but in the case of man they need refer only to the mortal component of a composite nature. This possibility is at least left open. The intention to leave it open, moreover, is strongly suggested by the way in which Diotima avoids imputing to the *ψυχὴ* itself limited immortality through *γένεσις*. She attributes it instead to the parts of the body (207d6–8), to the body itself (207e1), to the states of the soul (207e2–208a7), and finally, in summation, to "the body and all the rest" (208b3–4), a phrase unlikely to mean "body and soul."²⁹ In this first of three stages, then, in her explanation of immortality, a reader will not find any denial of the immortality of the soul, but he may well wonder why she neglects to assert it while devoting ten lines to the states and activities of the soul (207e1 ff.). A satisfactory answer to this question will have to be found.³⁰

²⁷ Morrison 44; Hackforth, "Immortality," 43; Horn 269.

²⁸ Dover, "The Date of Plato's *Symposium*," 16–20.

²⁹ Harold Cherniss, in a letter to CR 3 (1953) 131, cites *Laws* 721bc in refutation of Hackforth's view of the *Symposium*. In that passage man's desire for immortality is said to be satisfied by children and posthumous fame, though elsewhere in the *Laws* (e.g., 959b, 967d) the soul is said to be immortal. At the time he wrote the *Laws*, therefore, Plato saw no contradiction between these two uses of the term "immortal." Morrison (43–44) denies the relevance of *Laws* 721bc but is controverted by Dover ("The Date of Plato's *Symposium*," 18). Luce (140–41) cites *Ep.* 7.334e–335a and *Tim.* 90 as evidence of the same attitude. The latter is discussed in note 46 below. See also Bluck, trans. *Phaedo*, 28–29, note 1.

³⁰ Hackforth states the question accurately and forcefully in response to some of his

In the second stage of her explanation, her silence on the immortality of the soul continues. The immortality envisaged for those whose motive is fame, whether they are pregnant in body or in soul, consists in the perpetuation of name and reputation. In the third and last stage she takes up the life of philosophy. This is described as a quest taken up in common by *ἐραστής* and *ἐρώμενος*, in which they come to know and to love objects of increasing value but successively more difficult of access, of which the last is absolute Beauty. In this passage of some eighty lines there is only one reference to immortality. It occurs at the end, in the following context:

ἄρ' οἶει, ἔφη, φαῦλον βίον γίγνεσθαι ἐκείσε βλέποντος ἀνθρώπου καὶ ἐκεῖνο ᾧ δεῖ θεωμένου καὶ συνόντος αὐτῷ; ἢ οὐκ ἐνθυμῆ, ἔφη, ὅτι ἐνταῦθα αὐτῷ μοναχοῦ γενήσεται, ὁρῶντι ᾧ ὁρατὸν τὸ καλόν, τίκτειν οὐκ εἰδῶλα ἀρετῆς, ἅτε οὐκ εἰδῶλον ἐφαπτομένῳ, ἀλλὰ ἀληθῆ, ἅτε τοῦ ἀληθοῦς ἐφαπτομένῳ· τεκόντι δὲ ἀρετὴν ἀληθῆ καὶ θρεψαμένῳ ὑπάρχει θεοφιλεῖ γενέσθαι, καὶ εἴπερ τῷ ἄλλῳ ἀνθρώπων ἀθανάτῳ καὶ ἐκεῖνῳ; (211e4–212a7)

The word *ἀθανάτῳ* here cannot refer to an immortality of fame, references to which do not occur after the transition at 209e5. Instead a new goal of action is immediately introduced *ὧν ἕνεκα καὶ ταῦτα ἔστιν*, and this is later defined as absolute Beauty, for the sake of which (*ἐκείνου ἕνεκα τοῦ καλοῦ*, 211c2) the philosopher is said to rise through all intermediate stages of love and knowledge. For this reason, and not only because it is the last of many steps, absolute Beauty is twice called the *τέλος* (210e4, 211b7). The contemplation of this object is what makes the viewer's life worth while (211e4–212a2). This is not yet to say that he is immortal, but when that word is finally introduced a few lines later several reasons combine to make it certain that what is meant is the literal immortality of the philosopher's soul in communion with absolute Beauty. The first reason is the structure of Diotima's whole argument, in which the long discourse on immortality is based on an earlier conclusion that the object of eros is to possess the good for oneself forever (207a2–4). We have already seen that, unless she means to say that in no case is eros ever satisfied, the last kind of eros in the ascending hierarchy of erotes will be one which actually achieves this goal as opposed to approaching it *κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν*. These expectations are encouraged towards the end of her speech by the insistence with which she now emphasizes that what separates her earlier topics from her present one is the gulf that lies between "mortal foolishness" and the divine (211e3) or between semblance and reality (212a4). In earlier sections she had

critics, in trans. *Phaedo*, 21, note 2. What is missed in Diotima's speech is an explicit assertion of the soul's immortality. *ἀθάνατον δὲ ἄλλη* (208b4) may contain a reference to the soul, but the immediate context does not provide the means to prove this.

contrived by a kind of abuse of terminology to overlook this gulf, by employing the term *ἀθάνατος* in statements in which it did not strictly belong.³¹ Secondly, when she wishes to describe for Socrates in terms related to ordinary experience what it is like to attain this highest object of eros, what she compares it to, as something on a far lower level, is being in the company of one's *παιδικά* forever (*αἰεί*), if somehow that were possible,³² simply gazing and being together (*θεᾶσθαι μόνον καὶ συνεῖναι*, 211d7–8). In speaking of the other term of the comparison, in which the correlative of *τὰ παιδικά* is absolute Beauty, she repeats the words *θεᾶσθαι* and *συνεῖναι* (212a2). The word *αἰεί* is not repeated, but a substitute to round off the comparison is at hand in *ἀθανάτῳ*. It can serve this purpose only if it is meant in its full and literal sense. Finally the philosopher is said to gaze on absolute Beauty *ᾧ δεῖ* and *ᾧ ὁρατόν*. A similar phrase (*ᾧ προσήκει*) is used at *Republic* 490b3 to identify the rational part of the soul.³³ All these features of the passage point to the conclusion that the philosopher's soul will find literal immortality in contemplation of absolute Beauty.³⁴ The fact that Socrates reacts to her

³¹ The meaning is so far diluted that at 209c7 it can be used in the comparative form *ἀθανατωτέρων*, evidently to mean "longer-lasting." Plato's only other use of this comparative is in a satirical sense at *Phaedo* 99c4.

³² This contrary-to-fact protasis is proof that *αἰεί* is meant in the sense "forever" rather than in the weaker sense "uninterruptedly."

³³ See Bury *ad loc.* The notable difference between the passages is that Diotima does not use the word *ψυχή*.

³⁴ The condition *εἴπερ τῷ ἄλλῳ ἀνθρώπων* at 212a6–7 is sometimes spoken of as if intended to leave a shadow of doubt or of qualification over Diotima's last sentence. Wippen 158, note 123, compares it with *κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν* at 207d1 and with similar phrases elsewhere. Horn 276 thinks it reduces the conclusion to the weak and cautious statement that the philosopher "zum mindesten den gleichen Anspruch auf Unsterblichkeit habe wie irgend ein anderer. . . ." But constructions of the type *εἴπερ τις ἄλλος, εἴπερ πού ἄλλοι* etc. are far more commonly used to strengthen than to weaken an assertion and are normally to be classified as conditions only in a formal sense. Kühner-Gerth II.2.573 speaks of them as intended only to convey the meaning "more than anyone (anything etc.) else." In certain Platonic examples, those at *Phaedo* 78c, 65c and 66a, the meaning adumbrated is, more precisely, "to the exclusion of anyone (anything, anywhere) else." A good illustration of the use of these conditions to add emphasis is found at *Phaedo* 63c, where Socrates contrasts his merely hopeful assertion that he will meet good men in the afterlife with his secure and confident assertion that he will meet good gods. Of the latter he says: *εὖ ἴστε ὅτι, εἴπερ τι ἄλλο τῶν τοιούτων, δυσχρησαίμην ἂν καὶ τοῦτο*. A clause of this kind is therefore an appropriate idiom with which to contrast the philosopher's true immortality with the mere semblance of it achieved by other men. Bury, referring to Horn, sees in the condition at *Symp.* 212a6–7 "a possible ground for doubt" regarding personal immortality. He resolves this doubt mainly by appealing to context and the doctrine of other dialogues. Nevertheless, he regards the clause as expressing the possible qualification that the philosopher is not immortal *qua* ἀνθρώπος but only *qua* rational soul (xliii–xliv). This is subtle but probably unnecessary. Greek and Platonic usage strongly favors the simpler interpretation "he above all," which Bury considers but falls short of endorsing. Other Platonic examples of this idiom can be found at *Gorg.* 453b.

speech with an exhortation of a type that elsewhere in Plato follows descriptions of the after-life helps to confirm this judgment.³⁵

The metaphor of *τόκος ἐν καλῶ* was introduced as the proper activity of eros at 206b7–8. It is maintained throughout Diotima's discourse on immortality and appears again in the last two lines, as follows: "(Do you not see) that it falls to him, when he has begotten true virtue and nourished it, to become a friend of the gods and, if it falls to any man, immortal?" In whom is true virtue here said to be begotten? The preceding three pages have treated the ascent to absolute Beauty as a joint endeavor, and in the last page, beginning at 211c1, Diotima has dropped the distinction between teacher and pupil.³⁶ Both ascend the ladder of τὰ καλὰ, and the virtue which results from what they see is evidently begotten in both. Diotima, however, says at 212a6 that the friendship of the gods comes to one who begets true virtue, and elsewhere in Plato this friendship is a consequence of one's own virtue. At *Euthyphro* 11a the love of the gods is said to be a consequence of holiness, and at *Republic* 612e and 621c a man's character is said to determine whether he shall be loved or hated by the gods. If these parallels have any force, the phrase *τεκόντι δὲ ἀρετὴν ἀληθῆ* refers primarily to the philosopher's own virtue and not primarily (let alone exclusively) to the results of his good influence upon others. This fact alone would make it difficult to maintain, as Hackforth does, that even in this last sentence the philosopher becomes immortal only in the sense that he achieves "vicarious self-perpetuation" by teaching virtue.³⁷

The last limb (*τεκόντι . . . ἐκείνω*) of Diotima's long final rhetorical question asks us to believe that the virtuous win the love of the gods and become immortal. The two passages of the *Republic* mentioned in the last paragraph, 612e8–614a8 and 621c, provide a strikingly similar

Prot. 352c8, 329b, *Soph.* 238b, *Phaedo* 92c, 58e, 67b, *Laches* 179b, *Laws* 900e, 663d, 667a, *Symp.* 211d, *Euthyd.* 296b, *Theaet.* 192c, and *Apol.* 21c. The examples at *Rep.* 497e, *Parm.* 134c, 150b, and *Meno* 93c are arguably exceptions to the norm as stated by Kühner-Gerth.

³⁵ Compare with *Symp.* 212b the passages which follow the myths of the after-life in *Rep.*, *Gorg.*, and *Phaedo*. After each of these four accounts, Socrates says: I believe; so too should you (or all other men); and you must act on this belief. To a notable extent even the language of the passages is similar, e.g.: "The myth may save us if we believe it . . . if we believe what I say we shall always hold to the upward path . . ." (*Rep.* 621c3–5); "I believe . . . and I call on all other men too . . ." (*Gorg.* 526d4, e1); "because of this one must make every effort . . . it seems proper and worth the risk to think that this is so . . ." (*Phaedo* 114c6–7, d4–6); "I believe, and believing I try to persuade others too . . . I say every man must . . ." (*Symp.* 212b2–3, b5). Dover (ed. *Symp. ad loc.*) points out some of these parallels, omitting the *Rep.*, and some differences of tone as well.

³⁶ At 210e5 it is the *ἐράμεινος* or pupil who suddenly sees absolute Beauty. At 211b it is the *ἐραστής* or teacher. At 211c1 the description of the ascent is said to apply indifferently to one or the other.

³⁷ Hackforth, "Immortality," 44.

sequence of ideas. In the first, the man of virtuous life gains the friendship of the gods and because of that friendship wins prizes, especially the prize of happiness in the after-life. In this argument, as in *Symposium* 212a, the word *θεοφιλῆς* is used as an intermediate term between virtue and its rewards.³⁸ Again at 621c, in the last sentence of the *Republic*, Socrates encourages his companions to "practice justice with wisdom in every way, that we may be friends to ourselves and to the gods both while we remain here and when we claim the prizes which are its due . . ." Since the prizes are awarded by the gods, their friendship is a condition of the award, and their friendship in turn is a consequence of justice in the soul. The reference to prizes here in the *Republic* is primarily a reference to the virtuous man's enjoyment of his immortality, in the literal sense which that word possesses in *Republic* X. Since the corresponding term in the sequence at *Symposium* 212a is *γενέσθαι . . . ἀθανάτω*, it only requires that we take *ἀθανάτω* in the literal sense to make each passage end with a promise of reward after death. This coincidence tends to corroborate a conclusion to which other arguments already direct us.

Although discrepancies with familiar Platonic doctrine diminish the more closely we inspect Diotima's argument in this last part of her speech, there are two features bound to disturb anyone who comes to it with expectations formed by the last book of the *Republic* or by the *Phaedo*. In the first place, for Diotima immortality is a prospect held out to the philosopher and not to anyone else, except in the weakened sense of survival in one's children or one's reputation.³⁹ In the second place, not even the philosopher or the philosopher's soul is said to be immortal by nature. Instead he becomes immortal. That he should become so is an achievement and a reward.⁴⁰ The singularity of what Diotima says might best be brought out by dropping into this context any one of a number of statements taken from discussions of immortality found elsewhere in Plato, such as *ἀθάνατον ἢ ψυχὴν τι εἶκεν εἶναι* (*Phaedo* 73a2), *παντὸς μᾶλλον ἄρα . . . ψυχὴ ἀθάνατον καὶ ἀνώλεθρον* (*Phaedo* 106e9), *ψυχὴ πᾶσα ἀθάνατος* (*Phaedrus* 245c5), or *νομίζοντες ἀθάνατον ψυχὴν* (*Republic* 621c3). Placed anywhere in her speech, a statement that the soul is immortal by nature would make it difficult for her to present immortality as the special prize of the philosophic life. Because of this, a further step is needed before we can say that Diotima's doctrine of immortality is compatible with what we find in the *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Phaedrus*.

³⁸ Note especially *Rep.* 612e5–613b1, 614a5–8.

³⁹ Accordingly, Hackforth, in his second look at the problem (trans. *Phaedo*, 20–21), concedes it to be arguable that the soul of the philosopher-mystic is imperishable, but he firmly denies this possibility for anyone else mentioned by Diotima.

⁴⁰ For reasons shortly to appear, I think it misleading to translate *γενέσθαι* as "is," the word used by Guthrie (390).

The step required consists in recognizing that Plato uses the opposition of *θνητός* and *ἀθάνατος* to convey two kinds of contrast. The difference is approximately what distinguishes "perishable/imperishable" from "human/divine." According to the first usage, the human soul, or at least its rational part, is *ἀθάνατον*, whereas the body is *θνητόν*. A statement of the type *ἀθάνατον ἢ ψυχή*, which assumes the meaning "imperishable," contains no ground of distinction between men and gods or between philosophers and tradesmen. All can claim *ἀθανασία*, but for some of them imperishability will be a misfortune, because it will bring punishment after death instead of reward. The terms, however, have another use, occasionally found in Plato⁴¹ and common throughout Greek poetry, in which they are applied to men or gods, individually or collectively, rather than to bodies or souls. When they are so used, men are, generally speaking, said to be *θνητοί* and gods *ἀθάνατοι*. In contexts of this sort, beyond telling us that men die and the gods do not, the words announce a distinction which has implications of status, of comfort, and of well-being. When used with the definite article, in the forms *οἱ θνητοί* and *οἱ ἀθάνατοι*, they even purport to state the essential distinction between men and gods.⁴² This usage does not call into question the continued survival of the soul. To say that men are *θνητοί* is compatible with saying that after death their souls will exist in Hades, but in classical Greek literature these dead are generally not envied.⁴³

The barrier that separates men and gods is crossed whenever the gods intervene to make a mortal *ἀθάνατος*. Immortality in this sense is an accomplishment or a gift, and it normally implies happiness as well as immunity from death. It is in this sense that Calypso offers to make Odysseus immortal at *Odyssey* 5.209. A similar privilege is announced to Menelaus at 4.561. Zeus makes Ganymede immortal in the *Hymn to Aphrodite* (5.214), and Demeter intends for a time to do the same for Demophon in the *Hymn to Demeter* (2.242). The list of mortals who become immortal by divine favor also include Heracles, Aristaeus,

⁴¹ E.g., *Laws* 740a6, 901d8. A high proportion of examples in Plato are found in quotations of poetry, e.g., *Phaedrus* 252b8, *Rep.* 386d1.

⁴² The contrast "human or animal vs. divine" is less apt to arise, but it occurs at Herodotus 1.216 *ad fin.* in the form *θνητά* vs. *θεοί*. It is also implicit in Diotima's opposition of *θνητόν* to *θεῖον* at *Symp.* 208a7–8, in a context in which "what is mortal" refers to both men and animals. This last passage also illustrates the fact that it is rare to find a use of *θνητός* or *ἀθάνατος* in which the only reference is to perishability or one where the only reference is to status. What is divine is imperishable, and what is imperishable is at least akin to the divine (*Phaedo* 81a, *Rep.* 611e). But there are exceptions. At *Laws* 906a5, the *ἀθάνατος μάχη* is simply a battle that never ends or "perishes." There is also the anomaly that at *Hymn to Aphrodite* 5.259 *θνητοί* is so firmly established as a status term in the sense "men" that it does not include the Nymphs, although they are mortal.

⁴³ See *Odyssey* 11.488–91.

Phylonoe, Iphimede, Ariadne, and Tithonus.⁴⁴ In such stories immortality is a gift of the gods reserved for the elect and particularly for those whom they love.

The word *ἀθανάτω* at the end of Diotima's speech is best understood as an example of the second of these two uses of *ἀθάνατος* and in the light of these legends about grants of immortality. Her use of *γενέσθαι* rather than *εἶναι* points to this interpretation,⁴⁵ as does her presentation of immortality as a reward to the philosopher from gods who love him rather than as a necessary attribute of the soul. Her speech is therefore not about the imperishability of the soul at all, but rather about the never-ending blessedness to be achieved through a life of philosophy.⁴⁶ Her conclusion implies that the philosopher's soul is imperishable and is consistent with a belief in the imperishability of everyone's soul, but explicit references to the latter doctrine are not to be found in what she says. They are, on the contrary, painstakingly avoided where it might have seemed natural to introduce them. This evasiveness about a matter that is so near to her topic is one aspect of the problem of interpreting

⁴⁴ *Odyssey* 11.601–604 and Pindar, *Nem.* 1.67 ff. (Heracles); Pindar, *Pyth.* 9.63 (Aristaeus); Merkelbach-West, *Frag. Hesiodica*, 23.12 (Phylonoe), 23.24 (Iphimede, i.e., Iphigeneia); Hesiod, *Theog.* 949 (Ariadne); *Hymn to Aphrodite* 5.218 ff. (Tithonus). In several of these examples, *ἀθάνατος καὶ ἀγήρω* is the formula for divine status, and its abridgement is damaging to Tithonus. But *ἀθάνατος* by itself is sufficient at *Odyssey* 5.209 and Pindar, *Pyth.* 9.63.

At *Euthyd.* 289b Socrates hypothesizes an *ἐπιστήμη* of "making men immortal."

⁴⁵ At *Menex.* 247d, *ἀθανάτους* . . . *γενέσθαι* is cited as a far-fetched example of a gift one might ask of the gods on behalf of one's children, and at Tyrtaeus 12.32 (West) a mortal man *γίγεται ἀθάνατος* in the figurative sense of achieving fame.

⁴⁶ Cf. Bury's comment that *ἀθανασία* in 212a is a matter "not simply of quantity but of quality of existence" (xlv, note 2).

There are some resemblances between Diotima's way of speaking about immortality and the language found at *Tim.* 90. In that passage man is described as a composite creature who by his actions can allow himself to become, as far as possible, mortal (*θνητὸν γίγνεσθαι*, 90b4–5) or to win a share, as far as possible, of immortality (*μετασχεῖν* . . . *ἀθανασίας* [note aorist] 90c2–3). Immortality, so understood, is said at 90c to involve the thinking of divine thoughts and to guarantee happiness. It seems also to be identified with the goal of being lifted heavenward at 90a. None of this prevents Plato from using *ἀθάνατος* at *Tim.* 69c ff. to identify a fixed attribute of one form of soul. *Theaet.* 176ab is similar in content to *Tim.* 90, but the variation in wording is instructive. Here the philosopher's aim is to flee from earth to where the gods are and to become like god as far as he can. The terminology of becoming immortal is here replaced by that of assimilation to the divine or *ὁμοίωσις θεῶν*. Cf. *Rep.* 613b1.

Bluck, trans. *Phaedo*, 28, note 1, shows that the phrase "becoming immortal" is readily reconcilable with the doctrines of the tripartite soul and reincarnation. In that context "it will mean to become freed, through gradual purification and 'unification,' from the cycle of death and reincarnation . . ." This much is probably true, but it seems wrong to speak of a possible "introduction of the doctrine of the tripartite soul" as a way to explain the occurrence of the phrase at *Symp.* 212a, since Diotima says nothing about that doctrine or about reincarnation.

her speech that must be recognized and accounted for. It is already noticeable at 207e–208a. There, while saying that the states of the soul, like the body and its parts, are perishable, she avoids saying whether this is true of the soul itself. Later, at 210e, in describing the discovery of absolute Beauty, she makes no reference to Anamnesis, a doctrine that would compel her to refer to the disembodied soul. It would admittedly be inconvenient to declare the immortality of the soul in a context in which "immortality" is a term being used to identify an object of desire and an achievement rather than a property of souls. But we should think twice before saying that Plato could not have managed this without losing the thread of his argument. The real reason for her silence on these points lies in the literary form of her account. She has chosen a rhetorical structure in which suspense is an important element. The reader is obliged to wait until the end to see each element in her account of eros justified in its full and literal sense: only the philosopher will possess that which is truly good for himself forever. The most that one can say of the artisan or the statesman is that through eros he attains what is good (more or less) for himself (in a sense) forever (so to speak). We rise beyond this limited fulfillment of eros in two parallel movements which occupy in succession the closing section of Diotima's speech (210a–212a). The first ends at 211ab with an account of the nature of absolute Beauty, the second at 212a with an implied promise of immortality for the man who possesses it. This climactic promise, introduced in the third of three rhetorical questions, is actually withheld until the last phrase of her speech: ἀθανάτω καὶ ἐκείνω. To have stated at any point in the course of this long argument that the souls of all men are imperishable would have been not only inessential to its conclusion but rhetorically crippling. It would have raised prematurely the possibility of a higher goal than children or fame and compromised the development of the speech towards a climax.⁴⁷ As it stands, Diotima's

⁴⁷ Other reasons have been found for Diotima's reticence, among them: "the difference in atmosphere between *Phaedo* and *Symposium*" (Luce 140); the claim that a clear assertion of the immortality of the soul before this audience would have required a long, digressive proof (Bluck, trans. *Phaedo*, 29, note 1); the alleged irrelevance of that doctrine in a speech which deals with man only as he is exposed to the deficiencies of earthly existence (Wippen 137–38). Of the last two it can be said that (1) Diotima says a great many other things that she does not offer to prove, and (2) the fact that mention of the after-life is avoided does not constitute a reason for its avoidance.

Dover argues that Diotima's failure to mention the immortality of the soul is not "important"; her recommendations are what they would have been if she had mentioned it ("The Date of Plato's *Symposium*," 20). Her silence is understandable "if Plato did not think it would enter his readers' heads that he disbelieved . . ." (ed. *Symp.*, 149). He adds that if we avoid expressing the immortality doctrine in the form (1) "I shall exist when my body is dead" (which asserts the continuity of the individual) and choose instead (2) "There is in me something which will exist when I am dead," Diotima's language at 207d1–3 falls easily into place. Leaving aside the interesting issue whether it falls more

presentation, beginning at 207a, proceeds by measured stages from animals to men, from survival through self-regeneration and physical progeny to survival in fame, and finally to survival in the presence of absolute Beauty. The last section, on philosophic eros, is itself built upon a progression of stages.

The reason for this rhetorical structure of preparation through stages, suspense, and final revelation is not far to seek and has already been mentioned in this paper. Diotima is a mystagogue initiating Socrates into the secrets of the philosophic life. At 210a1 she speaks of the division of her argument as if it were a transition from one stage to another of mystic revelation.⁴⁸ This metaphor is a common one in Plato. No reader can fail to notice how often he uses the language of mystery religion in order to describe the practice of philosophy and the hopes of the philosopher. Reasons can be found for this which do not require us to say that Plato was an admirer of mysteries.⁴⁹ Like the μύσται, Plato was concerned with rewards and sufferings in the after-life. Moreover, his conception of levels of achievement in the pursuit of knowledge, which is presented systematically in the educational scheme of the *Republic*, and which finds other expressions in the *Symposium* and elsewhere, has its

easily into place, I question whether (2) can be the preferred version in an account in which the philosopher wins the love of the gods and immortality for himself.

⁴⁸ The transition at 209e5 ff. is sometimes said to mark the boundary between Socratic and Platonic doctrine, e.g., by F. M. Cornford, "The Doctrine of Eros in Plato's *Symposium*," in G. Vlastos ed., *Plato, A Collection of Critical Essays*, vol. 2 (Garden City 1971) 125 and 129, and by R. A. Markus, "The Dialectic of Eros in Plato's *Symposium*," *ibid.* 134. Apart from the fact that Diotima's presentation of her doctrine in stages can be explained without assuming this, it seems to me impossible that Plato could have chosen the contemptuous wording ταῦτα . . . ἴσως, ὃ Σώκρατες, κἂν σὺ μνηθείης to make such a point.

⁴⁹ This is a contentious point. Guthrie maintains that the mystery religions, and especially the Orphics, "must be accepted as a major influence on his thought" (339). Cf. A. W. H. Adkins, "Clouds, Mysteries, Socrates, and Plato," *Antichthon* 4 (1970) 23: "Plato believed that a real philosophical truth was enshrined in such a use of language." It is true that mystery language is very common in Plato. What this proves, I think, is only that mysteries were an important influence on Plato the artist. Their terminology provided him with the resources for various light and satirical effects, including ridicule of the sophists (*Euthyd.* 277de) and moments of mock-solemnity (*Theaet.* 155e). It could, on the other hand, suggest in serious passages the importance and the difficulty of the philosopher's quest. Apart from that, his references to the mysteries exhibit what Jeanne Croissant calls "un rationalisme impénitent," in *Aristote et les Mystères* (Liège-Parys 1932) 15. In his subtle review of this question, A. Diès concludes that even in the mystery passages of the *Phaedrus* we have the "traduction d'une doctrine tout intellectuelle . . ." (*Autour de Platon*, vol. 2 [Paris 1927] 445–46). Detailed and balanced discussions can be found in Paul Friedländer, *Plato*, trans. H. Meyerhoff, vol. 1 (New York 1958) 71–84, and in Éd. des Places, "Platon et la Langue des Mystères," *Annales de la Faculté des Lettres, Univ. Aix* 38 (1964) 9–23. Adkins' case is convincingly dealt with by G. J. de Vries 1–7, and R. S. W. Hawtrey, "Plato, Socrates, and the Mysteries: A Note," *Antichthon* 10 (1976) 22–24.

natural analogue in the levels of initiation of the mysteries. So it is without straining a metaphor that Socrates can refer light-heartedly to his elenchus as an initiation, at *Meno* 76e, or rebuke Callicles, who has been chafing at his questions at *Gorgias* 497c, for seeking to be initiated into the Greater Mysteries before the Lesser.⁵⁰ In the *Phaedrus*, in a more serious passage (249c, 250bc), the vision of the Forms by disembodied souls and the recollection of them in this life are both referred to as acts of participation in the mysteries. In inventing Diotima's speech Plato has carried this literary artifice of mystic revelation to a point perhaps not reached elsewhere.⁵¹ The occasion justifies Socrates' display of rhetorical virtuosity, and the audience of Athenians at the dinner party would easily recognize its inspiration in the rules which governed such rituals as the Eleusinian Mysteries. Initiation into these was by stages: the Lesser Mysteries, the Greater, and within the latter the *ἐποπτεία*, the final privileged revelation about which nothing certain is known except that in the course of it something was seen. Diotima not only uses this technical term in the form *ἐποπτικά* at 210a1, but she justifies it by using verbs of seeing ten times in the last eighteen lines of her speech.⁵² What these Mysteries promised to their initiates was the friendship of the gods and a happy life in the world beyond. That much is indicated in as early a document as the *Hymn to Demeter* (2.480–89).⁵³ Both promises are found, appropriately, in the last two lines of Diotima's speech. Finally, her unwillingness to anticipate her conclusion before she arrives at what she calls τὰ ἐποπτικά is a reflection of the Eleusinian rule of secrecy. The strictest silence was enforced about the advanced rites and particularly about the object of *ἐποπτεία*. Only late in the festival and only to those properly prepared could the secret be revealed. Diotima's calculated evasions, though rhetorically effective, are more

⁵⁰ Undeveloped brief references like these might suit non-Platonic contexts just as well. De Vries thinks the one at *Gorg.* 497c may be semi-proverbial (6).

⁵¹ Lest we take the mystical form of Diotima's speech more seriously than the philosophic content, we should note that it has its boozy counterpart in the speech of Alcibiades. The central portion of the latter, for all its genuine praise of Socrates, is a parody of a mystery rite. The clearly marked transition from Lesser to Greater Mysteries is assisted by wine (217e1–4) and is accompanied by a command to the uninitiated to withdraw (218b5–7; see Bury *ad loc.*). As in Diotima's speech, what is revealed is an ἀμήχανον κάλλος (218e2), in this case ironically disparaged by its possessor. All this is heard from a speaker whose reverence for real mysteries was highly suspect (Thucydides 6.28; Plutarch, *Alcibiades* 22).

⁵² See Kranz 446. How important the act of seeing was in the Eleusinian Mysteries is brought out by N. J. Richardson ed., *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Oxford 1974) 28, and by M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Munich 1967) 661. See also I. Linforth, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Princeton 1961) 239 ff.

⁵³ See also Sophocles, frag. 837 (*TrGF*); Pindar, frag. 137 (Snell-Maehler); Isocrates, *Paneg.* 28.

than the artifices of a rhetorician. They are also true to Plato's metaphor of mystery religion and to her assumed role of mystagogue.⁵⁴ Like the physician, the comic poet, and the tragic poet who spoke immediately before him, Socrates, in inventing Diotima's speech, has given it a style and a structure that reflect the speaker's profession.

⁵⁴ Diotima has only vaguely described credentials (she is "wise in these things and in much else," 201d). Her Mantinean origin, however, is usually thought to conceal a pun on *μαντική*, and it is mentioned with some emphasis at a solemn moment (211d1–2). It is possible too that we are meant to think of her as capable of rising to the challenge implicit in 206b9 (*μαντείας . . . δείραι*). Joined with these mere suggestions is one accomplishment: she secured for Athens a postponement of the plague through sacrifice (201d). This was an ἀμοιβή τῶν θνσιῶν, something which, along with *τελεταί* and *μαντεία*, is explicitly said to be in the province of Eros, the mediator between men and gods (202e3–203a1). On all these counts she is *δαμονία* in the sense of 203a5, i.e., skilled in such meditation. The reference here to *τελεταί*, a term commonly used of mystery initiations though not confined to them, may foreshadow the role of mystagogue which she later assumes.

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