Interpreting Plato: Knowledge and Desire from the *Apology* to the *Symposium*

Interpretando a Platón: conocimiento y deseo a partir de la *Apología* y del *Simposio*

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Resumen

Al interpretar un texto platónico, una de las cuestiones más importantes es la de si se debe y cómo se debe relacionar otros diálogos con el texto a interpretar. Algunos afirman que cada diálogo es una unidad dramática y, por tanto, contiene un mensaje filosófico propio. Otros dirán que todo el corpus platónico debe ser considerado como una unidad que se desarrolla, y que por eso los diálogos pueden ser comparados. Finalmente, algunos defienden que los diálogos deben ser leídos a la luz del «Platonismo», las doctrinas que Platón nunca plasmó del todo en un solo texto. Con este trabajo trataré de demostrar cuán fértil y esclarecedora puede ser la comparación de diálogos para la interpretación de estos. Me concentraré en relación entre la *Apología* y el *Banquete* para demostrar esta metodología.

Palabras clave: Platón - hermenéutica platónica - Banquete - Apología - Epistemología.

Abstract

When interpreting a Platonic text, one of the most important hermeneutical questions is whether and how other Platonic dialogues relate to the text in question. Some say that each dialogue is a dramatic unit and, therefore, that it contains a philosophical message of its own. Others say that the Platonic corpus should be considered as a unity that develops, and therefore dialogues can be compared. Finally, some defend that Platonic dialogues should be read in the light of "Platonism", the doctrines of Plato that were never fully developed in any single Platonic text. In this essay I would like to show how the comparison between dialogues is fruitful and instructive for interpretation. I will focus on the kinship between the *Apology* and the *Symposium*, in order to demonstrate this methodology.

Key words: Plato - Platonic hermeneutics - Symposium - Apology - Epistemology.

1. Introduction

One of the main discussions amongst commentators of Plato has focused on which sources one ought to use to interpret the dialogues [1]. A common position says that a dialogue represents a compact philosophical and dramatical unity, and therefore everything that the interpreter needs is within the limits of the dialogue itself: it is not necessary to refer to other dialogues or other ancient sources. Another important position, championed by Vlastos, says that Plato's dialogues can be divided according to a gradual development in the author from the so-called *early* dialogues to the *mature* dialogues, passing through a middle period. According to this view, we can imagine that Plato had in mind the ideas developed in early dialogues when he wrote the mature ones, but not the other way around. Therefore, positions held in early dialogues can be used to understand some discussions in more mature dialogues, either as being starting points or as having been overcome by more advanced positions. This approach is influenced by the stylistic critics of the 19th century, especially

1 The three positions mentioned here are thoroughly exposed by Gerson in Lesher (ed.), 2006, p. 47-54.

from Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher's analysis groups Plato's texts in different sets, according to similar stylistic characteristics or philosophical features that supposedly show the gradual development of Plato's thought. A third position affirms that it is impossible to understand Plato outside of his context. To interpret him, it is necessary to dip into his interpreters and critics from antiquity, because then we would be able to relate Plato's doctrines in the dialogues with the so-called *unwritten doctrines*, that were considered by ancient authors to be as Platonic as those displayed in the dialogues[2].

In this paper I will argue against the position of those who affirm that a dialogue is a compact philosophical and dramatic unity, that can (or should) be isolated to be understood. The proponents of this position assume that, given that each dialogue exists as a separated dramatic unity, then it must also be a philosophical compact unity, separate from other dialogues[3]. We should be cautious in trying to compare one dialogue with another, knowing that many would disagree with this procedure. But, as Gerson says, there is no better proof of the truth of a certain approach than its fruitfulness with respect to the interpretation itself[4]. If my approach is correct, then a compared reading of the *Apology* and the *Symposium* together will enable us to reach a better understanding of both dialogues[5].

2 Reale, 2004, p. 35-37.

3 One of the sources of this position appears to be the parallelism drawn between Platonic dialogues and Shakespeare's plays, whose ideas and life remain largely unknown to us, except from what we can gather from his theatrical writings. What these interpreters have assumed is that there is a similar problem with Plato's work: we cannot know anything about Plato's thought except from what he wrote in his dialogues. So, as any play of Shakespeare should be studied by itself, also any dialogue from Plato should be interpreted atomically, without referring to a bigger encompassing frame about which we do not know anything. The problem with the argument is that we do have ancient testimonia about Plato and Plato's thought besides what is found in the dialogues. Plotinus, Proclus and Aristotle are only the tip of the iceberg of a whole regiment of biographical and philosophical sources that allows us to reproduce Platonism in a way that would be impossible to replicate with the Bard's thought. See Gerson in Lesher (ed.), 2006, p. 54.

4 Gerson in Lesher (ed.), 2006, p. 54.

5 It may not pass unnoticed to the reader that I do not discuss in this paper the third position; that is, the one which calls to interpret Plato within the further context of Platonism. I understand that we can hold the second position (a given dialogue should be read in the context of the Platonic corpus) without either rejecting or affirming the third position (he should be read within the context of Platonism). To deal with this position would, in my view, exceed the limits of the present work.

I will propose three different lines in which these dialogues can be compared. The first of them is the thematic parallelism: what are the common topics among the two dialogues? The second is a comparison between the characters of each dialogue, since Plato rarely deploys a character without a purpose, and his characters usually incarnate a good deal of meaning. Lastly, I shall propose that there is a continuity in Plato's critique of Athenian intellectuals, started in the *Apology* and deepened in the *Symposium.*

2. Thematic parallelism

a) The Judicial Backdrop

The *Apology* constitutes, alongside the *Crito* and the *Phaedo*, the triad of dialogues dealing with Socrates' death. The *Crito* as well as the *Phaedo* unfold in a jail, where Socrates has been taken prisoner after his judgement and is waiting to be executed. Giovanni Reale[6] has observed that while in the *Crito* and *Phaedo* Plato uses Socrates as a *dramatis personae*, he shows a more realistic portrayal of Socrates in the *Apology,* and does not simply use Socrates' *persona* as a way of philosophical expression. Regardless the position that we adopt about the problem of the *historical Socrates*[7]*,* we can admit–without risking too much–the core of Reale's argument. Without doubt, the *Apology* narrates one of the most public moments of Socrates' life. Many Athenians would have been able to recall it vividly, and if Plato's testimony was not truthful, we would expect to have reports in this respect. Therefore, in the *Apology*, Plato "positions himself in an objective dimension, that we could call in modern terminology that one of the historical truth"[8], against the dramatic stage which he uses in other dialogues.

The *Apology* takes us to a historical moment: 399 B. C., the year in which Socrates was judged and condemned. The accusation of which Plato gives testimony is confirmed by Xenophon in his *Memorabilia*: "Socrates is culpable of unbelief in the gods of the city and of introducing new deities; he is also guilty of corrupting the youth" (Xen. *Mem*. I 1). Although, as Socrates points out to the jury, his accusers give a rather different account. Socrates has earned the hate of many powerful men because he dared to question them and

6 Reale, 2016, p. 9.

7 We could refer here to another unfinishable dispute among scholars about Plato's writings: to what extent are the dialogues a reliable source about the historical Socrates? The dispute has been summarized by Kahn, 2004, p. 1-35.

8 Reale, 2016, p. 10.

encouraged young men to question those who say that they know, while not knowing (*Apol*. 23b-24b).

The dialogue is divided into three speeches. In the first speech Socrates states his defense, it is the longest and most complex of the three. Socrates refutes his accusers and divides them in two groups: the true accusers (those who have identified his philosophy with the teaching of the sophists and the natural philosophers), and those, influenced by the latter, who have brought a false accusation to the tribunal (*Apol*. 18b-c). In the second discourse, having been condemned to death, Socrates had the possibility of appealing to the jury for a lower penalty. However, he completely refuses to beg for mercy, knowing that he had committed no crime. Instead, he reaffirms that his work is a divine gift to the city, and that he has no right to go against the god's will (*Apol*. 30c-31c). Finally, in his third discourse, Socrates, the judgement having been confirmed in a second vote, abandons his role as defendant and starts accusing others. First, he charges those who voted to condemn him, auguring that great evils for them and for the city would follow from their injustice. Then he faces those that were willing to absolve him, reminding them that the greatest evil has been inflicted to the city by the city itself, and not to him; because whether death is an evil or not, no one can say with certainty. Instead, committing injustice is the worst evil possible.

The *Apology* begins with the city's judgement against Socrates and finishes with the judgement of Socrates' judgement of the city. It concludes that the city has not been worthy of Socrates' divine gift, since he had been sent to exhort them to live according to the virtues of the soul, instead of living for wealth and pleasure. Socrates himself finishes his first discourse putting his fate in the hands of the god and asking that the outcome of the judgement could be the most profitable for the city (*Apol*. 35d).

The judicial backdrop of the *Apology* is patent. But what about the judicial background of the *Symposium*? It seems that the environment in which it develops could not be less judicial. The *Symposium* is a friendly meeting and does not portray any of the tensions of the *Apology*. Socrates is not only welcomed in the meeting, but also occupies the place of honor next to the celebrated Agathon. Yet, as we will see, the actions of the *Symposium* develop within a judicial backdrop, just as in the *Apology.*

The first hint is given just after Socrates enters the room where the banqueters are gathered. Agathon had planned everything so that Socrates would have to sit just by his side (*Sym*. 175 b-c). He seizes the occasion to flirt with the philosopher, suggesting that sitting side by side with someone so wise was a great opportunity for him, hoping that some of Socrates' wisdom could flow towards him. Socrates mocks Agathon: "It would be so simple if wisdom could flow from one body to other! In that case, I would be the lucky one, sitting next to such a wise man, who just a few hours before was being acclaimed by the Athenians because of his artistic genius". Agathon grasps the irony in Socrates' words and says:

> You rude mocker, Socrates! said Agathon. A little later on you and I shall go to law on this matter of our wisdom, and Dionysus shall be our judge. For the present, let the dinner be your first concern (*Sym*. 175e)[9].

It is interesting to observe that the language used by Agathon in this passage is markedly judicial. Dionisius is not just the jury in a literary contest, he is the judge (δικαστής) in the proper sense. Nor is Dionysius going to settle who is the better speaker of the two, but that Agathon and Socrates are going into trial (διαδικασόμεθα). This is not just a friendly game or banquet among friends, but also a trial.

The challenge has been issued. Then the banqueters will agree to spend the night discoursing and philosophizing about Eros, instead of drinking and listening to the flute-girl. The table is set for the trial and after Socrates' speech–since he is the last speaker–someone abruptly barges into the room:

> A few moments after, they heard the voice of Alcibiades in the forecourt, very drunken and bawling loud, to know where Agathon was, and bidding them bring him to Agathon. So he was brought into the company by the flute-girl and some others of his people supporting him: he stood at the door, crowned with a bushy wreath of ivy and violets, and wearing a great array of ribands on his head (*Sym*. 212d-e).

Alcibiades bursts into the banquet disturbing the sober harmony that the diners had imposed upon themselves. He is drunk, brings the flautist back who was expelled from the room at the beginning of the dinner, and is followed by a cheerful mob. He is more than just a disturber of the philosophical evening. Alcibiades represents Dionysius himself[10], that had been summoned when the

9 For direct quotation of the *Apology* I will use Harold North Fowler's edition, 1966. For the *Symposium* Lamb's, 1911.

10 Strauss, 2001, p. 255.

banquet was about to start. Alcibiades has come to honor Agathon for his victory in the Dionysia embodying Dionysius himself and being followed by the usual courtship of the god.

Alcibiades approaches the couch where Agathon is laying. He sits between Agathon and Socrates, although he does not notice the presence of the philosopher at first. Then he takes some of the flowers off of his crown and adorns Agathon with them. Agathon calls a servant to take Alcibiades' sandals off so he can lay with the rest of the diners, and in that moment Alcibiades notices that the third man–sharing a coach with him and Agathon–is Socrates, and reprimands him for always looking for the company of beautiful men like Agathon. But despite his amazement and seeming jealousy, Alcibiades cannot but express his admiration for Socrates. Right after he takes some of the ribbons from Agathon's head and crowns Socrates with them (*Sym*. 213 d-e).

In this way the dramatic prologue of Alcibiades' discourses reaches its end. He will pronounce the seventh and last discourse of the dialogue. As Leo Strauss notices[11], here the saying *in vino veritas* (in wine lies truth) is fulfilled. Why? Because only someone possessed by the god can utter a genuine sentence. Agathon summons the presence of Dionysius so that he can judge between his wisdom and Socrates'. And through Alcibiades, drunken and therefore possessed by the wine's god, sentence has been announced: Socrates is the wisest.

This consideration refers to the discourse of Socrates in front of the assembly that will put him to death. He does not believe that he is wiser than the others, rather it was Apollo, through the oracle, who had announced that Socrates was the wisest man in the city (*Apol*. 20e-21a). This sentence, contrasting with that of the Athenians, cannot be false since the god cannot lie (*Apol*. 21b). The gods' judgement about Socrates' wisdom constitutes the counterpart of men's judgement, and while in the *Apology* the city condemns Socrates, in the *Symposium* he is awarded the honors he himself asks for in his discourse of clemency in the *Apology* (*Apol*. 38b).

b) The figure of the Philosopher

The *Apology* is, as we have said, closer to what we could call a historical testimony of Socrates. In contrast with the historical Socrates, Plato chose

11 Strauss, 2001, p. 253.

to portray a fictional Socrates in most of the dialogues, one that is certainly modeled after the historical Socrates. However, he does not necessarily say or think whatever the historical Socrates might have said or thought. Plato adopted dialogue as a genre of literary writing since he believed that a plurality of λόγοι is necessary for the truth to flourish. Now, the strategy that Plato adopts raises a number of problems regarding interpretation. How do we know what Plato really thought? As Lloyd Gerson has observed, one of the dangers in which the interpreter can fall is thinking that it is not necessary to accept the "vision" of Plato, since Plato himself does not defend any vision whatsoever[12]. Plato seems to have hidden himself behind a series of masks that have forever diluted his thought. Should we interpret this characteristic as Plato's preference for some sort of relativism, a trick to present opposite doctrines without taking a definite side with any of them? Certainly, some have interpreted Plato in that way.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to deny that among all Plato's characters, Socrates is his favorite voice for presenting philosophical ideas. Even if we accept that Plato spread his ideas among all his characters, we are not forced to admit that every idea and character are at the same level. Socrates is the hero of the dialogues, and Plato affirms this categorically, as we have seen, in the *Symposium*. This is not an arbitrary decision: Plato identifies the life of the philosopher with the way of life that Socrates embodied. Therefore, the Socrates of the dialogues is not one among many characters but is the character that best expressed what Plato really thought. He is a fictional character, but that does not mean that he is false, for Plato models that fiction in order to be faithful to the ideal that the historical Socrates incarnated so excellently.

The *Apology* and the *Symposium* are full of allegories and images that help us to comprehend the Socratic ideal which Plato embraces and defends in the dialogues. In fact, this is one of the most important points of comparison between the two dialogues. The *Apology,* as we have seen, is the dramatic action that tells us how Athens judged and put Socrates to death. The *Symposium* is Plato's response to that judgement. In both writings, Socrates' defense is a defense of what Socrates embodies: the philosophical ideal of life. The images that Plato uses in both dialogues can be divided in two groups. The first one shows the nature of the philosopher, *what* the philosopher is. The second group illuminates what his specific function is, the ἔργον of the philosopher.

12 Gerson in Lesher (ed.), 2006, p. 49.

David O'Connor has noticed that, even when the banqueters of the *Symposium* have agreed on praising Eros, each one of the discourses is, deep inside, a praise of the orator himself[13]. This movement is something very natural, since we can only praise love inasmuch as we are capable of loving. Socrates' discourse is also a eulogy of Socrates, as much as each of the other discourses are a praise of its utterer as well. But differently from the other orators, Socrates does not praise Eros without reservations, but affirms that to praise something it is necessary to do it in a way that corresponds with the reality of what is being praised. The rest of the speakers have affirmed that Eros was the best of the gods, the most beautiful, wise and generous with mankind. Socrates in contrast starts saying that Eros is not a god but a mediator between human and divine affairs (*Sym*. 203 a-e). He is the son of Πόρος and Πενία, Resource and Poverty, and participates both of his mother's and father's nature. Is it not Socrates who is always bare-foot, homeless and searching? (*Sym*. 203 c-e.) Is there someone more capable of winning a discussion or more resourceful in speaking? Socrates is the son of Poverty and Resource. The philosopher (since Socrates is the philosopher *par excellence*) is the one walking towards wisdom. He is not wise, he has not reached wisdom yet, but neither he is ignorant since he knows he is not wise and is looking for wisdom.

In the same way, "The Philosopher is dying all the time, chastening himself by acknowledging his own ignorance, but also being reborn in his enduring and cheerful aspiration to rise towards wisdom"[14]. The philosopher is like a phoenix, whose very nature is to die in order to be born again (*Sym*. 203 e). It may be one the most beautiful images that Plato uses to describe the essence of philosophy, that is not only a mean between ignorance and wisdom, but a continuous rebirth based on the capacity of the philosopher to challenge his own ideas, being open to criticism and therefore overcoming himself. The philosopher is the erotic man quintessentially. He is the man whose life is guided by the desire of going beyond his own conclusions to go deeper in the truth.

If the *Symposium* underlines the philosopher's essence, the *Apology* stresses the mission (ἔργον) of the philosopher. In the *Apology* Socrates must defend his mission in front of his accusers, a mission given to him by the god. Socrates earned the hatred of his fellow citizens for unmasking the ignorance

13 O'Connor, 2015, p. 3-6.
14 O'Connor, 2015, p. 185.

of those who pretended to know (*Apol*. 21b-22e). In his attempt to show the god that he was not the wisest of the Athenians, he wandered by the streets of Athens with the objective of finding someone wiser than himself (*Apol*. 30a-b). But he didn't find such a man, since all those who were supposed to know something did not know anything. Furthermore, they thought they knew, without knowing. So, the mission of Socrates acquired a new meaning. His mission was to awaken Athens to the real wisdom.

This is connected to other passages of the Platonic corpus where Socrates is portrayed as a midwife, whose mission was to urge his interlocutors to give birth to beautiful and true ideas (*Theat*. 148a-149b). Socrates' challenge is not primarily directed to refute human wisdom, but to urge others towards a superior wisdom. The ἔργον of the philosopher is not simply to suspend judgement (as the skeptics claimed), but to raise the intellects of his interlocutors towards a higher horizon.

In the *Symposium* the ἔργον of Eros is also compared to the maieutic art[15]. Diotima compares desire with pregnancy. Everyone, men and women, is willing to give birth in a beautiful body (*Sym*. 206 b-e), and reach some degree of immortality in that way, which we reach through descendance. In the same way our soul desires to give birth to beautiful and true ideas, but we will only go into labor if we have found an adequate mean for these ideas to be born. The philosopher, in a similar way to Eros, has the mission to provoke his interlocutor through dialogue to give birth to beautiful and true ideas.

c) Dialogue and Discourse

Let us pay attention now to some of the other connecting points between the *Apology* and the *Symposium.* The image of the phoenix applies also to the intellect: man must constantly die to his own ideas to get deeper into the knowledge of reality. Human wisdom is necessarily a reality going *on its way* and the genuinely wise man knows that what he knows is necessarily partial. We find this metaphor of the road in many Platonic dialogues. This is especially the case in the *Symposium.* The characters that start the dialogue, speaking about the events that occur in the house of Agathon, were walking from the Piraeus towards Athens (*Sym*. 172 a). Later, Socrates meets Aristodemus on his way to Agathon's house, and they take the opportunity to walk together to find a good excuse to justify Aristodemus' arriving uninvited to the dinner

15 Richardson Lear in Lesher (ed.), 2006, p. 106. Commenting on: *Symposium* 208 b-d.

(*Sym*. 174b-d). The road is a metaphor of the discursivity of human intellect and its transitoriness. But not only philosophers grasped this discursivity of human intellect: orators recognized that rationality is discursive as well.

Both the *Symposium* and the *Apology* are Platonic writings ruled by discourses. In the *Symposium* the banqueters spend the night praising Eros with beautiful speeches. Phaedrus, who first sponsors the idea, proposes each of the participants to praise Eros with a speech, since none of the great poets had previously made a eulogy in his honor. Each one of the diners commits himself to praise Eros on those terms. But when Socrates' turn arrives, he apologizes for doing so in the following way:

> it was in ignorance that I agreed to take my turn in the round of praising. 'The tongue,' you see, undertook, 'the mind' did not; so good-bye to my bond. I am not to be called upon now as a eulogist in your sense; for such I cannot be. Nevertheless, I am ready, if you like, to speak the mere truth in my own way; not to rival your discourses, and so be your laughing-stock. Decide then, Phaedrus, whether you have any need of such a speech besides and would like to hear the truth told about Love in whatsoever style of terms and phrases may chance to occur by the way (*Sym*. 199a-b).

In the *Apology*, Socrates does not have much chance to establish a dialogue. Maybe that is the reason why his bitter tone in this dialogue contrasts so greatly with the cheerful irony that he displays in other places. Socrates starts his defense apologizing for his way of speaking, declaring himself a stranger to judicial language (*Apol*. 17d-18a). He is not an orator, even when he is obliged to act like one under the circumstances. Nonetheless, the *Apology* is splashed with great dialogical moments. The stellar moment of Socrates' defense, when he refutes face to face his accuser Meletus, is one such passage (*Apol*. 24 d-e). It is also interesting to observe how Socrates constantly appeals to the audience and gives answers to their questions[16].

In the *Symposium* we find a passage that brings light to the preference of Socrates for dialogue over discourse (*Sym*. 174 d). Socrates meets Aristodemus on his way to Agathon's house and invites him to join him, even when had not been invited to the dinner. Aristodemus refuses saying that a simple-minded man should not go to the house of a wise man, for he would be out of place (falling into ὕβρις). Socrates persuades him saying that they would be able to find a good excuse on their way to the party: "'*σύν τε δύ, ἐρχομένω πρὸ ὁδοῦ*'

16 Among others: *Apology* 24d-26e.

βουλευσόμεθα ὅτι ἐροῦμεν. ἀλλ᾽ ἴωμεν", "'If two go together there is always one who goes before' to plan what is to be said. Now, let's go". The first phrase is taken by Socrates from the *Iliad* that says: "If two go together, there is always one going in front to spy what benefit can be achieved" (X 224)[17]. The dialogue does not only express the discursive nature of reason like rhetoric. It also emphasizes the dependence that reason has on companionship. The pursuit of truth is a cooperative task. We saw how Socrates defined the ἔργον of the philosopher as giving birth and helping others to give birth in beauty. Dialectic represents that maieutic exercise that goes in both directions: if two go together, there is always someone to help the other to comprehend what benefits can be achieved.

3. The Characters of the *Symposium* in the *Apology*

a) Aristophanes

It is natural for us to treat the relation between Socrates and Aristophanes in a special way for two reasons. First, because of the quarrel that developed between the two. Aristophanes criticized Socrates in his famous comedy the *Clouds,* and Plato answered on behalf of his teacher in the *Symposium.* But, more importantly, because Aristophanes is the only character that is explicitly mentioned in both the *Apology* and the *Symposium*, which makes him central for our purposes.

Who was Aristophanes? He was the greatest of all Athenian comic poets. His comedies are full of social criticisms and their main objective was to defend the city from dangerous novelties. It is important to recall that theater in classical Athens played an important social function. Theater was one of the tools that the city had to educate, triggering in the spectator the right sensations of admiration and rejection towards noble and detestable situations respectively. As Leo Strauss said: "Being a poet Aristophanes is concerned with making men in the cities good and noble; being a comic poet, he is concerned with concealing vice, i.e., with depriving vice of its attraction by ridiculing it"[18].

One of those dangerous novelties was the sophists. These errant teachers would go from one city to the other, destroying the traditions of the elders

17 I owe this reference to Lamb's translation of the *Symposium* in LOEB Classical Library.
18 Strauss, 1992, p. 5.

and teaching the young "the unjust argument". By 423 B.C.[19] Aristophanes presented one of his most famous comedies: *The Clouds.* Socrates is portraited there as a sophist (in the Socratic sense of the word)[20]. The comedy tells us the story of Strepsiades, indebted by his son's love of horses and racing. Strepsiades conceives the idea to send his son, Pheidippides, to study with Socrates, so he can learn how to deceive his creditors with sophistic trickery. Finally, Pheidippides accepts and happens to be a great student. But the injustice that Strepsiades planned for his creditors backfires when Pheidippides beats his father up and persuades him that he did so justly. But Pheidippides was to imprudent and tries to expand the scope of his argument into proving the justice of beating his mother too. That was too much for the poor Strepsiades. Filled with divine rage (Hermes himself as messenger of the gods will help him in his subsequent actions), Strepsiades burns down Socrates' school[21].

The greatest critique of Socrates by Aristophanes in *The Clouds* is that he teaches his students the *unjust argument.* This art allows one to present a weak argument as a strong one in front of a tribunal. A person that masters the *unjust argument* would be capable of justify anything: defrauding creditors, beating one's parents up or affirming that the gods *are not.* In fact, the Socrates of *The Clouds* teaches Strepsiades that Zeus *is not,* that he does not exist. That entails, in Aristophanes' mentality, annihilating the very foundations of the city, since only fear of the gods can sustain the basic moral consensus upon which the city is founded[22].

In the *Apology* Socrates denies roundly that he is like the Socrates of *The Clouds* (*Apol*. 75c), and that is because the accusation of *The Clouds* has its echo in Meletus' accusation:

> Socrates is a criminal and a busybody, investigating the things beneath the earth and in the heavens and making the weaker argument stronger and teaching others these same things (*Apol*. 19 b-c).

According to Meletus' accusation, Socrates makes stronger the weaker argument. This is the core of Aristophanes accusation, not only against Socrates but against all the sophists. There is a logical sequence in Meletus' accusation that is developed in *The Clouds* as well: Socrates spends his days

19 Nails, 2002, p. 56.
20 Strauss, 1992, p. 3.
21 For a detailed summary of *The Clouds* see Strauss, 1992, p. 11-53.
22 Strauss, 1992, p. 44.

observing natural phenomena and looking for natural explanations for these phenomena. Who is Zeus? The god of thunder and king of heaven. But, says the Socrates of *The Clouds*, it is the clouds and not Zeus that produce thunder. Zeus becomes a useless hypothesis for those studying the natural causes of the phenomena. The unjust argument is indeed this: that the gods *are not*. Why? Because someone who does not believe in the gods, cannot justify the moral order of the city. The good is good because the gods want it to be that way. That is why teaching the youth the unjust argument is corrupting them.

Nietzsche criticized Socrates for having rejected and destroyed the tragic conception of the world. "In the person of Socrates, the belief in the comprehensibility of nature and in the universal healing power of knowledge has first come to light"[23]. The writers of tragedies and comedies sanctioned right and wrong according to what the gods had established. Socrates questions that belief: the pious is pious because the gods demand it, or the gods demand it because it is pious? (*Euthyph*. 7a-8b.)

Even when Aristophanes' critique of Socrates seems harsh, the poet has a place in the *Symposium.* Moreover, the relation between Socrates and Aristophanes does not seem to be tense, even when the actions depicted in the *Symposium* take place in 416 B. C.[24], seven years after *The Clouds* were presented. Why? I think we can find the answer in the *Apology.* At the beginning of his defense, Socrates distinguishes among two kinds of accuser: Meletus and his companions, who formally presented the accusation, are simple tools in the hands of his real accusers. This second group (by far more frightening) had been spreading slanders about Socrates for years throughout Athens. In Socrates' own words:

> Besides, these accusers are many and have been making their accusations already for a long time, and moreover they spoke to you at an age at which you would believe them most readily (some of you in youth, most of you in childhood), and the case they prosecuted went utterly by default, since nobody appeared in defense. But the most unreasonable thing of all is this, that it is not even possible to know and speak their names, except when one of them happens to be a writer of comedies (*Apol*. 18c-d).

Aristophanes escapes from the more bitter part of Socrates' critique. It is not the accusations or their falsity what annoys Socrates the most, but the

23 Quoted by Strauss, 1992, p. 7.
24 Nails, 2002, p. 9.

hypocrisy of his accusers. Aristophanes is the only one that openly criticizes Socrates and, therefore, rightly deserves a place in the *Symposium.* His critique to Socrates in *The Clouds* is harsh, yes, but at least has been done frankly. The poet is not a shadow, but an interlocutor.

b) Other Characters

In 415 B. C., in the middle of the Peloponnesian war, Athens was divided by a political dispute. The supply lines had been cut by the Spartans, and the citizens were divided into those who wanted to invade Sicily to assure the city's supplies and those opposed the invasion. The first were led by Alcibiades III and the second by Nicias I. Finally, both were elected by the assembly to lead the expedition. While the fleet was getting ready to sail, all the Hermaic steles of the city were mutilated one night. A commission to find the identity of the perpetrators was soon established. When the fleet was about to sail, a slave called Andromache accused his master and other nine (among which was Alcibiades) in exchange for immunity. Alcibiades persuaded the assembly to let him sail and postpone the judgement until after the invasion was finished, but only to be required to return soon after. He deserted, fled to Sparta and was condemned *in absentia*[25].

This Alcibiades is the same that bursts into the house of Agathon and crowns Socrates. That is, one of the most prominent and frequent members of the Socratic circle. But not only Alcibiades was condemned. Among the criminals were also Eryximachus[26] and Phaedrus[27], both members of the intimate circle of Socrates' friends as well as characters of the *Symposium.* The three of them were young and promising members of Athenian's high society. They were the *crème de la crème* of the Athenian youth, those who were supposed to beat Sparta in the war but, instead, spent their time ridiculing that which the city held as most sacred.

Alcibiades in particular was the highest exponent of his generation. Less than thirty years old, he had already been called to command the Athenian fleet with Nicias. Without doubt, he was one of the most promising Athenian youths, and his relationship with Socrates, as O'Connor explains, would not

25 For an excellent treatment of the "Hermocopid conspiracy" see Nails, 2002, p. 17-20.
26 Nails, 2002, p. 143.
27 Nails, 2002, p. 232-233.

pass unnoticed in Athens[28]. He was an example of what they meant when they said that Socrates corrupted the youth. This may be the most notorious accusation against Socrates in the *Apology*, namely that he was impious. In fact, the defense of Socrates against these two accusations is the core of his first discourse (*Apol*. 17a-35d). Moreover, if we analyze carefully, we see that they are intimately related. Socrates corrupts the youth teaching them that the gods do not exist. The gods are the foundations of the city: they are the guaranty against incest, treason and murder. That is why sacrilege is the worst crime possible: it consists in attacking the very moral foundations of the city.

We can conclude that there is a relationship between the *Symposium* and the accusation held in the *Apology:* Socrates corrupts the youth. Those that frequent his company learn to dishonor the gods. This idea is the shared core of both the accusation of Meletus in the *Apology* and of Aristophanes in *The Clouds.* Plato gives us even an additional hint. The *Symposium* starts with a dialogue between Apollodorus and a couple of men inquiring about the happenings that had occurred in Agathon's house (*Sym*. 17a-173a), when the diners made discourses to honor Eros. Apollodorus tells his interlocutors that he was not present for that occasion and only knows the facts from hearsay. The dinner had occurred long ago, before Agathon abandoned the city. By the given data we can locate this prologue in 399 B. C., exactly when Socrates was being tried for impiety[29]. People were curious for the events of that night, that linked Socrates with Alcibiades, since now Socrates himself was being judged for impiety. No doubts that Socrates' enemies had that in mind too when accusing him of corrupting the youth.

From what has been said it is natural that we also ask ourselves for the veracity of these accusations. Does Socrates really corrupt the youth? The evidence is against him. His friends, those who frequented him and learned from him, were accused of impiety. And rightfully so, as far as we know.

The *Symposium* is Plato's answer to this accusation. It is not by chance that we have Eryximachus, Phaedrus and Alcibiades seated around the table. It is not a coincidence that Aristophanes is there either. The *Symposium* is a trial and therefore the actors of the trial must be present: Socrates is the accused, Aristophanes plays the accuser and Eryximachus, Alcibiades and Phaedrus are Socrates' witnesses.

28 O'Connor, 2015, p. 21.
29 O'Connor, 2015, p. 190.

Let us turn to the discourse of Alcibiades at the end of the dialogue (*Sym*. 215a-222b). He will perform, as we said, a different discourse from those that were given so far. All the banqueters had delivered a discourse honoring Eros; Alcibiades will honor Socrates with his. The discourse is dominated by bitterness. Alcibiades praises Socrates for the beauty of his discourses (*Apol*. 221c-d), his virtues (*Sym*. 219e-220c) and courage in battle (*Sym*. 220 c-e) but he reproaches Socrates for rejecting him. He affirms that Socrates seduces the most beautiful boys to let them down afterwards, and confesses that he himself, after having fallen deeply in love with him, weaved a plan to confess his love to Socrates. When the occasion came, he kept Socrates until very late in the night. When he tried to leave, Alcibiades invited him to spend the night with him. When the lights were off, and the servants had already left, he approached Socrates and confessed his love, declaring that no one was worthier than Socrates of receiving his graces, with all his power, richness and contacts. For only Socrates was capable of turning him into a man. In other words, he proposes that Socrates become his lover (ἐραστής). Then he shares with us Socrates' answer:

> My dear Alcibiades, I daresay you are not really a dolt, if what you say of me is the actual truth, and there is a certain power in me that could help you to be better; for then what a stupendous beauty you must see in me, vastly superior to your comeliness! And if on espying this you are trying for a mutual exchange of beauty for beauty, it is no slight advantage you are counting on–you are trying to get genuine in return for reputed beauties, and in fact are designing to fetch off the old bargain of "gold for bronze". But be more wary, my gifted friend: you may be deceived, and I may be worthless. Remember, the intellectual sight begins to be keen when the visual is entering on its wane; but you are a long way yet from that time (218d-219a).

Socrates does not reject Alcibiades but proposes to him a whole new paradigm to achieve the beauty he desires. What Alcibiades proposed was common for the time. A virtuous and experienced man (ἐραστής) would take into his charge a young man (ἐρώμενος) in order to educate him. In exchange, the young man gave *his favors* to his protector (χαρισθῆναι), which were, of course, sexual favors. As we are told in the discourse by Pausanias, Athenians were fairly strict with the limits within which this interchange was permissible. No one could continue a relationship of this kind after beard had started to grow on the young man's face (*Sym*. 182-183a). We are not talking about a relationship among equals, this is an educative institution. The hidden idea behind this justification of educative pederasty is that proximity is a driver of virtue. Socrates explicitly criticizes this idea when Agathon suggests that

those seated around Socrates could drag some of the wisdom he received when staying in the front door (*Sym*. 175c-d).

The discourse issued by Pausanias is the counterpoint of Socrates' opinion about educative pederasty in the dialogue. It is an attempt at justifying educative pederasty (*Sym*. 184-185c). It is not strange, deep inside he just justifies himself. Pausanias, regardless the social restrictions that called to cut erotic relations with youngsters once they reached certain age, continues having an affair with Agathon, and had already overpassed widely the permitted age in which one could maintain a relationship with his educator at the moment of the *Symposium*[30].

Therefore, it is no coincidence either that these two are among the characters of the dialogue. Even when the portrait that Plato presents of Agathon is not, overall, bad, the image that his contemporaries had of him was not as positive. For example, Aristophanes ridicules Agathon in the *Thesmophoriazusae* for his dissolute lifestyle and his effeminate manners [31]. Agathon, who was also among the young promises of Athens, left the city for the court of Archelaus of Macedonia with his lover Pausanias, and thus neglected his civic duty. Plato's response to the accusations made against his teacher in the *Apology* is this: Socrates did not corrupt the youths teaching them to question the wisdom of Athens. The educative principles of Athens themselves conducted the young to intemperance instead of teaching them virtue.

Thus, it is not rare that Socrates appears in the *Symposium* as an example of moderation. Socrates never gets drunk (even when he can enjoy the pleasure of wine, *Sym*. 214a). He does not submit to fear in battle (*Sym*. 220e-221c), he does not give up when seduced by Alcibiades. This is the way of life that Socrates proposes to his friends: to live according to the virtue proper to man, to rule over the emotions and desires of the heart, to live mainly according to the goods of the soul (*Apol*. 29e). We could say with O'Connor that it was not Socrates who failed the young of Athens, but the young of Athens that failed him[32]. The problem of Alcibiades was not that Socrates was unfaithful to him (as he himself suggested when he saw Socrates seated next to the Agathon, *Sym*. 213d), but that he was not faithful to the ideal that Socrates proposed him. O'Connor suggests that Socrates represents the authentic lover (ἐραστής)

30 O'Connor, 2015, p. 52.
31 Nails, 2002, p. 10.
32 O'Connor, 2015, p. 199.

because he encourages a change of life in those he loves. The genuine lover is the one that takes us out of our comfort-zone and encourages us to be a better version of ourselves. Socrates, says Plato, has not failed to fulfill his mission. In Plato's mind, it was Athenian corrupted institutions that destroyed the Athenian youth, because they did not push the youths to become excellent.

4. Knowledge in the *Symposium* and in the *Apology*

The central part of Socrates' first discourse in the *Apology* is his recounting of how he earned the hatred of his fellow citizens. Socrates received an oracle from the god in Delphi: "Socrates is the wisest among the Athenians". How could it be if Socrates claimed to know nothing? To prove the oracle wrong, he went to the streets of Athens in search of a wiser man. Knowing that he would find one among the politicians, he addressed one of them:

> So examining this man–for I need not call him by name, but it was one of the public men with regard to whom I had this kind of experience, men of Athens–and conversing with him, this man seemed to me to seem to be wise to many other people and especially to himself, but not to be so; and then I tried to show him that he thought he was wise, but was not. As a result, I became hateful to him and to many of those present; and so, as I went away, I thought to myself, "I am wiser than this man; for neither of us really knows anything fine and good, but this man thinks he knows something when he does not, whereas I, as I do not know anything, do not think I do either (*Apol*. 21c-d).

After that, he engaged the poets, believing that they would be wiser than him, since they were able to write so many beautiful and true things:

> So, taking up the poems of theirs that seemed to me to have been most carefully elaborated by them, I asked them what they meant, that I might at the same time learn something from them. Now I am ashamed to tell you the truth, gentlemen; but still it must be told. For there was hardly a man present, one might say, who would not speak better than they about the poems they themselves had composed. So again in the case of the poets also I presently recognized this, that what they composed they composed not by wisdom, but by nature and because they were inspired, like the prophets and givers of oracles; for these also say many fine things, but know none of the things they say; it was evident to me that the poets too had experienced something of this same sort. And at the same time I perceived that they, on account of their poetry, thought that they were the wisest of men in other things as well, in which they were not (*Apol*. 22b-c).

Finally, he looked for the artisans, being sure that he would find wisdom among them. Were not the things they produced beautiful indeed? They had to possess real knowledge to produce what they produced.

And in this I was not deceived; they did know what I did not, and in this way they were wiser than I. But, men of Athens, the good artisans also seemed to me to have the same failing as the poets; because of practicing his art well, each one thought he was very wise in the other most important matters, and this folly of theirs obscured that wisdom, so that I asked myself in behalf of the oracle whether I should prefer to be as I am, neither wise in their wisdom nor foolish in their folly, or to be in both respects as they are (*Apol*. 22d).

Socrates concedes that the oracle was right: he was the wisest man in Athens, since human wisdom consists in realizing one's ignorance. Nevertheless, Socrates had already earned the hatred of the city because of his inquiry, since he had revealed the ignorance of others.

What can this passage contribute for our interpretation of the *Symposium*? I think that this is the single most passage where a parallel reading of both writings can be most fruitful. We have said that both the *Symposium* and the *Apology* deal with the figure of the philosopher, that both have a judicial backdrop, that there is a strong critique of rhetoric and a claim that dialogue is a privileged tool for philosophical inquiry in both. We have seen that the characters of both dialogues are strongly related. But even when we have presented many parallel topics among them, have we already find the point where they embrace each other? How could we say that the *Apology* is a good tool to interpret the *Symposium*? Without doubt all the topics discussed earlier shed light to some aspects of the *Symposium*, but the passages just presented will clarify the central topic of the dialogue.

To understand this, let us get our attention back to the characters of the dialogue. We have said, following David O'Connor[33], that each character had made a hidden praise of himself while praising Eros. Each one had expressed his own anxieties, illusions and pride. Each one of these men issues at the same time a veiled eulogy of his own profession. Phaedrus and Pausanias will speak in the manner of the sophists and political orators. It is not strange that both are portrayed by Plato in the *Protagoras* as well (*Prot*. 315c-e), a dialogue in which Socrates and Protagoras discuss the nature of virtue in front of many admirers of the old sophist. Even more, Phaedrus appears in the eponymous dialogue reading an extract of Lysias, another sophist. The doctrines developed by the third character, Eryximachus, are strongly influenced by those of the

33 O'Connor, 2015, p. 3-6.

great Greek physician, Hippocrates. Those of Aristophanes and Agathon need no presentation. Both were famous poets, the former wrote comedies and the latter tragedies. All the disciplines with which Socrates engages in the *Apology* are present here. Politicians, poets and artisans: the great representatives of the Athenian culture are all present at the table.

Let us consider the discourses of Phaedrus and Pausanias. Both are centered on the importance of virtue and on the importance of Eros to achieve it. Phaedrus (*Sym*. 178a-180b) tells us that a society ruled by Eros is the best possible society, since nothing makes us more likely to perform courageous acts than the proximity of the beloved one. Let us imagine an army composed solely of men united by erotic bounds. No one would abandon his position or yield to fear, for shame of being observed by the beloved. Pausanias (180b-185c) characterizes Eros in a similar way but disagrees with Phaedrus in treating it as if there would be just one kind of Eros. For Pausanias two kind of Eros exist: the celestial and the vulgar. Both are correlative to the two Aphrodites: the one that was born without participation of woman (the celestial Aphrodite) and the daughter of Zeus and Dione. Only the celestial Eros, companion of the celestial Aphrodite, truly generates virtue. And what kind of Eros is this? The one in which no participation of the feminine appears, the erotic love between men. It is no other than the love between ἐραστής and ἐρώμενος, since Pausanias defends in his speech the premises of educative pederasty. How does he justify the fact of seducing a young man? He argues that there is no good or evil action *by itself*, only good and ugly *ways* of acting. In this sense, pederasty can be beautiful just when a young man gives his favors in exchange of virtue. In the dialogue this dissolution of morality into an esthetic problem is no longer discussed, although Plato gives us his opinion about the speeches of the sophists:

> Pausanias' praise made a pause with this phrase–you see what jingles the schoolmen are teaching me! [34] (*Sym*. 185c).

The discourses of the sophists have no content. Their musical beauty is just a disguise behind which the most twisted interests can be hidden. Athens' golden age saw an awakening to the importance of words, of the strength they possess and the power they give to those that excel in speaking. The sophists realized the power words had and exploited the political possibilities they

34 The English translation by Lamb conserves the wordplay displayed by Plato in Greek: Παυσανίου δὲ παυσαμένου, διδάσκουσι γάρ με ἴσα λέγειν οὑτωσὶ οἱ σοφοί […].

provided. But they were not concerned about *what* was to be said as much as *how* it should be said. This is the great problem with sophistry according to Plato and Aristophanes. We need to remember that this is precisely what preoccupied Aristophanes in the first place: sophists were teaching the young the *unjust argument.*

The *Symposium*, however, does not explore the political consequences of sophistry, but rather the psychological ones. Rhetoric can be also a shell that hides the weaknesses and anxieties of the speaker. As O'Connor says[35], both Phaedrus and Pausanias avoid the force of Eros by trying to portray it as a simple tool to achieve virtue. Pausanias, at least, has very good reasons to do so. He is afraid that his love towards Agathon would make him seem weak, feminized or deprived of virtue. A man that has not been able to respect the limits that the law imposed to his relationship with Agathon and argues in his favor saying: "I'm not in love, I'm just interested in the virtue of this young man".

As many interpreters have noticed[36], the order of the speeches is essential for the interpretation of the dialogue. Plato gives us a hint of this just when the discourse of Pausanias finishes. After him, Aristophanes was supposed to speak, but a hiccup attack prevents him from speaking:

> I look to you Eryximachus, either to stop my hiccough, or to speak in my stead until I can stop it." "Why, I will do both," replied Eryximachus "for I will take your turn for speaking, and when you have stopped it, you shall take mine. But during my speech, if on your holding your breath a good while the hiccough chooses to stop, well and good; otherwise, you must gargle with some water. If however, it is a very stubborn one, take something that will tickle your nostrils, and sneeze: do this once or twice, and though it be of the stubbornest, it will stop (*Sym*. 185d).

This prologue to Eryximachus' discourse has a comic purpose. While our doctor speaks, Aristophanes will be holding his breath, gargling and sneezing. A rather comic backdrop to the serious discourse of our doctor[37]. But the question of order plays its part as well[38]. When he moves the discourse of Aristophanes to the second part of the dialogue, it is as if Plato were saying that the last three conform the heart of the dialogue and that they play a central

35 O'Connor, 2015, p. 55.
36 Strauss, 2001, p. 123.
37 O'Connor, 2015. p. 58.
38 Reale, 2004, p. 111.

role. He introduces also a fundamental difference with the order in which the disciplines were presented in the *Apology* and how they are presented here. In the *Apology* the last in being examined by Socrates were the artisans. I do not think that the order of Socrates' inquiry in the *Apology* has any importance at all. But the fact that he emphasizes the change in the *Symposium* tells us that it does have importance here.

Eryximachus represents the artisans. It is important to remember that medicine was not a liberal profession in the ancient world, but rather an art. There are important exceptions, of course: Hippocrates and Galen were great thinkers and artisans as well. Eryximachus pretends to be a great thinker too. His discourse clearly reflects the criticism of Socrates to his profession. Eryximachus (*Sym*. 185e-188e) needs no more than a second to deviate from the objective of praising Eros. He starts a great cosmological explanation of the world. But he also strays far from his own art. There is no doubt that Eryximachus was a great doctor, but his technical knowledge leads him to believe that he knows more than he actually does. Eryximachus says that medicine could be summarized as the reunion of opposites in the body: cold and heat, humid and dry. Eros is the force that binds opposites in the cosmos, making friends the alienated peers of the universe and finding harmony. So, he thinks, that one who controls the art of befriending the opposites in the body must control, as well, the principle that befriends opposites in the cosmos. In this way, the medic can extrapolate his art to other spheres of knowledge. He claims that medicine rules over music, mathematics and even the gods. Eryximachus may have a genuine knowledge of how to heal human bodies, but this is obscured by his absurd pretensions of controlling even the godly affairs with his art.

Aristophanes has a special relevance even among the select ones. As Reale notices[39], the discourse of Aristophanes lingers in the exact middle of the whole dialogue: there are seven discourses in total and Aristophanes' is the fourth. In the *Apology* too, Aristophanes occupies an important role among the accusers. This is another indication by Plato of the important link between the *Symposium* and the final events of Socrates' life. But also, an indication of the importance of poetry within the dialogue. The two poets, Aristophanes and Agathon are grouped with Socrates and isolated from the rest of the speakers. We can expect an especial treatment of poetry in the dialogue.

39 Reale, 2004, p. 112.

Aristophanes (*Sym*. 189c-193e) starts his discourse asking the audience not to laugh, since he would speak seriously, even though he says sounds ridiculous to some. The center of the discourse is the myth of the Androgyne. He tells us that in the beginning men did not have the same form that we have, but that they were whole spheres composed of two halves, two faces, four members and a pair of genitals. There were three kinds of spheres: those that had two masculine genitals, sons of the Sun; those who had two feminine genitals, descendants of the Moon; those that had a feminine and a masculine genital, progeny of the Earth. These original men were much faster and stronger than us. But they were also much prouder and decided to go to the Olympus and occupy the place of the gods. The gods were furious with these men's daring and decided to destroy them. But Zeus, who didn't want to lose the sacrifices that men gave to the gods, decided just to weaken them. He asked Apollo to cut them in halves, and to heal their wounds and restructure them. But the men traveled the world in despair, craving their other half and melting into them in embraces when they found them. They would die of starvation lest they do anything other than finding and reuniting with their other half. Seeing this, Zeus devised a way in which men could find some relief when embracing their other half and they could, in that way, keep working and fulfilling their duties with the gods. So, he sent Apollo again to move their genitals to the front of their bodies, so when they would embrace each other they may find some release. Zeus' strategy worked, but man's nature was not restored. That is why Aristophanes defines Eros as the pursuit of *one's own* (τό οἰκεῖον). That is, the pursuit of reestablishing our fallen nature.

Agathon (*Sym*. 194e-197e) begins his discourse with a methodological precision. Until now, the other participants have been discussing what were Eros' works and gifts to mankind. But no one had spoken about Eros or his nature. Agathon's discourse is the best example of the principle formulated by O'Connor for the *Symposium*: it is clearly self-praising. While speaking about himself, Agathon tells us that Eros is the most delicate, happy, beautiful and good. In praising Eros, he hides a praise of himself.

Socrates defines Eros as the aim to possess the good forever (*Sym*. 206a). This definition is both, a criticism and an assimilation of the poets' discourses. From Aristophanes he takes the idea of intentionality. Eros is incompleteness, and therefore he is always *of* something, he is always referring to something else. But he criticizes the idea that Eros is pursuit of one's own. Instead, he takes from Agathon that Eros is related to the beautiful and good. At the

same time, he denies that Eros is himself good and beautiful (as suggested by Agathon), since no one can desire what he already has. He assimilates the true knowledge that comes from the poets but giving to it a different scope and importance. In the critique of the poets portrayed in the *Apology*, Socrates makes a point on this issue. The λόγοι of the poets are indeed true, but the poets are not accountable for that truth. In uttering something, the poet is an instrument of the gods. But the gods speak rather mysteriously, the true sense of poetry needs to be unveiled.

By the end of the dialogue only three participants could stand their ground after Alcibiades' Dionysian irruption (*Sym*. 223c). These are Socrates, Agathon and Aristophanes. Plato adds that only Agathon was able to keep the pace of the conversation because by the end of it Aristophanes too started to doze. Plato plays here with one of his favorite metaphors, dream and vigil. Dreaming is the state in which the apparent looks real and we cannot differentiate between reality and appearances. Philosophy is awakening to reality, it is vigil.

Dream and Vigil are also an allegory of opinion (δόξα) and true knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). Plato advances here an epistemological issue that will be further developed in the *Republic* (*Rep*. 509d–511e). But in the *Symposium* Plato does not explore the epistemological problem, he is more interested with exploring the subjective conditions that the knower must feature in order to achieve philosophical knowledge. These conditions are, in Plato's opinion, moral conditions, as it is shown throughout the dialogue. Socrates is portrayed, as we have said, as the paradigmatic example of philosopher. Simultaneously, he has been shown as the tempered man *par excellence.* We have shown how he rejected the tempting suggestions of the young and beautiful Alcibiades, but he is also portrayed as a man enduring very low temperatures, as resisting dream and as one never wavering against alcohol (*Sym*. 214a-221c). He is the best example of what Plato considered to be the virtue of temperance (σωφροσύνη): the salvation of wisdom (σωτηρία τῆς φρονήσεως, *Crat*. 411e). For Plato temperance (and virtue in general[40]) is the condition for philosophical knowledge to be possible.

Thus, the *Symposium* qualifies and completes the account of the value and place of non-philosophical knowledge, and especially of poetry. In the *Apology*

40 For Plato temperance is not a virtue that can be considered alone, but a kind of harmony that shows how virtue rules in each part of the soul. For a further development of this issue see *Rep.* 430e-432a.

all the knowers fail to pass the Socratic test of wisdom. Neither the rhetoricians, nor the technicians, nor the poets are able to contend with Socrates' wisdom: the rhetoricians because their knowledge is not true knowledge but pure appearance of knowledge; the technicians because, even when they do have true knowledge, they illegitimately extend it to areas to which it does not apply; the poets because they believe that they are responsible for the knowledge they possess, when in reality it has a divine source. In the *Symposium* these conclusions are repeated and furthered: the only way for them to *really know* is to achieve the subjective conditions necessary for human beings to be *real knowers*: human virtues. This is especially true for poetry. The real sense of the divine utterances of the poets cannot be unveiled without virtue. Only Socrates, the virtuous man, is capable of true understanding of the conclusions of Aristophanes' and Agathon's discourses.

5. Conclusions

We have shown throughout our investigation that a parallel reading of the *Apology* and the *Symposium* is not only enriching but necessary to unveil the true scope of both dialogues. We have discovered that the *Symposium* is like a photographic negative of the *Apology.* Both place us in a judicial stage, were Socratic wisdom is to be judged and compared with the wisdom of the Athenians. Philosophical knowledge and dialogue contend with Athenian culture and rhetoric. But if in the *Apology* Socrates is condemned by Athens, in the *Symposium* he is crowned by Dionysius.

The relation between poetry and philosophy also reveals itself as a key issue in the dialogue. A very important epistemological thesis is furthered: there is no true knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) without temperance (σωφροσύνη). Socrates is portrayed as the truly temperate man and therefore as being able to gather the subjective conditions to truly interpret poetry.

These fruitful conclusions help us to further contribute in the larger debate of Plato's interpretation. Dialogues can, certainly, be read by themselves and we will find that they are beautiful and complete pieces of art and thought. But only when we read them in the light of the whole spectrum of Platonic thought will we be able to unveil the full extent of their meaning.

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