

## SOCRATES' *HYBRIS* AND ALCIBIADES' FAILURE

MICHAEL GAGARIN

IN A RECENT ESSAY on "The Paradox of Socrates"<sup>1</sup> Gregory Vlastos has tried to explain among other things why Socrates' interlocutors in the early Platonic dialogues learn so little from this man, who repeatedly emphasizes the importance of knowledge. In this paper I will not comment directly on Professor Vlastos' perceptive analysis but will take as my starting point his conviction (16) that behind Socrates' "failure of knowledge" lay a "failure of love." I hope to show that in the *Symposium* (which Vlastos does not mention) Plato portrays Socrates as a failure in certain respects, and that his failure in this dialogue is also to be understood as a "failure of love" in several senses. The purpose of this paper is to explore this aspect of Socrates as it is revealed in the *Symposium*, particularly in the deeply personal tribute of the drunken Alcibiades.

There is now general agreement that Alcibiades' speech is a vital element of the *Symposium*, and that a primary purpose of the speech is to portray Socrates as a living example of that *eros* which he praised in his own speech.<sup>2</sup> Critics have focused their attention, however, almost entirely on the positive aspects of Alcibiades' picture of Socrates and have virtually ignored Alcibiades' own explicit statement (222a7–8) that he has mixed criticism together with praise in his speech.<sup>3</sup> I do not wish to deny the validity or the importance of the praise of Socrates contained in the speech; I would even grant that the presentation of Socrates as the embodiment of *eros*, as the perfect student of *ta erotika*, is the most important aspect of the *Symposium*. But Alcibiades' criticism of Socrates is also a significant aspect of the dialogue which can not be ignored, and

<sup>1</sup>In *The Philosophy of Socrates*, ed. G. Vlastos (Garden City, N.Y. 1971), 1–21. Line references for Plato's dialogues will be to Burnet's Oxford Text (1901); I have also used editions of the *Symposium* by Hug (2nd ed., Leipzig 1884), Robin (Paris 1929), and Bury (2nd ed., Cambridge 1932), which hereafter will be referred to by the editor's name only. Similarly, the recent treatment of "*Hybris* in Athens" by D. M. MacDowell (*G & R* 23 [1976] 14–31) will be cited as simply "MacDowell."

An early draft of this paper was read at a meeting of the "Euthyphrones" at the University of Texas in March, 1975, where I received much helpful criticism, especially from D. Armstrong, E. D. Francis, A. P. D. Mourelatos, B. Seidensticker, and P. Woodruff.

<sup>2</sup>See Hug lxvii; Bury lx. For an excellent analysis of the dramatic unity of the dialogue and the importance of Alcibiades' speech for this unity see H. Bacon, "Socrates Crowned," *Virginia Quarterly Review* 35 (1959) 415–430.

<sup>3</sup>Hug (note on 219c7), for instance, treats Alcibiades' criticism of Socrates as only a cover ("Verhüllung") for his true admiration.

I hope to demonstrate this significance in this paper.<sup>4</sup> Briefly, I will suggest that Alcibiades' criticism illuminates an important feature of Socrates' character, his *hybris*; that this *hybris* is consistent with Socrates' doctrine of *eros*; and that this *hybris* helps explain Socrates' failure as a teacher.

# I SOCRATES AT THE BANQUET

The opening pages of the *Symposium* introduce us to the primary narrator, Apollodorus, who is a disciple of Socrates and a fanatic devotee of philosophy (172c3–173a3), and to Aristodemus, the secondary narrator, also a disciple. The latter, we should note, is a little fellow, "always unsandaled" (ἀνυπόδητος αἰεί, 173b2), and he was present at the banquet as a lover (ἐραστής, 173b3) of Socrates.<sup>5</sup> We shall return to these two later.

Aristodemus begins his narration by recalling how he encountered Socrates one day "washed and wearing sandals" (λελουμένον τε καὶ τὰς βλαύτας ὑποδεδεμένον, 174a3–4). We know from our direct sources for Socrates' life, Aristophanes, Xenophon, and Plato,<sup>6</sup> that both of these were unusual features of Socrates' appearance, and their rarity is immediately confirmed by Aristodemus himself (ἃ ἐκείνος ὀλιγάκις ἐποίει, 174a4). It is with reference to these unusual features, moreover, that Aristodemus first asks Socrates where he is going that he has become so beautiful (οὕτω καλὸς γεγενημένος, 174a5). In view of Socrates' traditional reputation for ugliness (cf. *Tht.* 143e), Plato seems to be confirming the anomalous nature of this figure of Socrates, who is going to Agathon's banquet, in his own words, "as one beautiful man to the house of another beautiful man" (καλὸς παρὰ καλόν, 174a9).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup>The only critic, to my knowledge, who takes Alcibiades' criticism seriously is Rosen (*Plato's Symposium* [New Haven 1968] esp. 278–327). But his interpretation of the dialogue is so vitiated by extraneous arguments and unwarranted speculation that his few valid observations tend to be obscured and overwhelmed by such meaningless conclusions as "the *hybris* of Socrates is not properly in tune with the generated or corporeal nature of human beings. Only the dialogue as a whole is an example of the perfect or Platonic *hybris*" (294).

<sup>5</sup>Bury gives "admirer" as the meaning of ἐραστής here. But surely in the context of the *Symposium* the meaning "lover" is meant to be heard here (cf. Robin's "*amoureux*").

<sup>6</sup>For references see Hug on 174a4.

<sup>7</sup>That there is something boastful and false about Socrates' beautifying himself may be suggested by καλλωπίζεσθαι (174a8–9), which elsewhere usually implies an unwarranted "swaggering" (Bury). On one level, of course, Socrates is merely jesting (cf. Hug *ad loc.*), but the element of "false pretense" which we will see in Socrates may be foreshadowed here. There is an interesting parallel in the *Apology* (20c2–3), where Socrates says that he would pride himself (ἐκαλλονόμην: "I would think myself beautiful") if he knew how (ἡπιστάμην) to educate young men, as the sophists claim to do. The implicit connection between beauty and knowledge is fully explored in the *Symposium*.

Upon Socrates' arrival Agathon invites him to sit beside him so that he (Agathon) may acquire Socrates' knowledge (175c7–d2). Socrates replies with skepticism about the possibility of transmitting any knowledge directly, but adds that were it possible, he would be glad to acquire Agathon's "great and beautiful wisdom" (πολλῆς καὶ καλῆς σοφίας, 175e2), since his own *sophia* is insignificant and doubtful (175e3). Even the uninitiated would recognize in this exchange that traditional Socratic "irony," the claim to know nothing.<sup>8</sup> Those familiar with the early dialogues would be aware, moreover, that this claim is not simply a deceptive facade, but is closely connected to a fundamental tenet of Socrates' teaching, that true knowledge can only be acquired after ignorance is admitted,<sup>9</sup> a truth that is also related to Socrates' skepticism about the possibility of direct transmission of knowledge (175d3–7).<sup>10</sup>

Agathon immediately rejects Socrates' claim of ignorance, not, however, with a simple denial but with an accusation: "Socrates, you are a *hybristes*" (ὕβριστῆς εἰ, ὦ Σώκρατες, 175e7). What are we to make of this puzzling charge? *Hybristes* commonly designates a violent or insolent person, and we are not surprised to hear the word used, e.g., of Meletus in the *Apology* (26e8). But how are we to understand the charge of *hybris* against Socrates?<sup>11</sup> An adequate answer will have to await consideration of Alcibiades' speech, where the charge recurs, but a preliminary explanation might begin with Bury's translation, "scoffer,"<sup>12</sup> which refers to the scorn and mockery implicit in Socrates' sarcastic praise of Agathon, together with his own ironic pretense of ignorance. This translation is only a starting point, however, since the frequent occurrence in the

<sup>8</sup>For Socrates' traditional claim of ignorance cf. esp. *Apol.* 22e–23b; the claim is denounced as "irony" by Thrasymachus in *Rep.* 337a (cf. *Gorg.* 489e1).

<sup>9</sup>E. L. Burge (*Antichthon* 3 [1969] 5–17) has a good discussion of Socrates' irony, where he refutes R. Robinson's view (*Plato's Earlier Dialectic* [2nd ed., Oxford 1953] 7–19) that this irony and the elenchus of which it is a part "involved persistent hypocrisy" and "showed a negative and destructive spirit" (10). Burge defends Socrates' irony as a sincere pedagogical device, though with regard to the *Symposium* he claims only that "Socrates refers to his own lack of wisdom in a spirit of pedagogical 'playfulness'" (16). Vlastos (above, note 1) also defends the sincerity of Socrates' irony.

<sup>10</sup>The connection between the learner's recognition of his own ignorance and the necessity of his acquiring knowledge through his own efforts, not through direct communication from another, will be made clear in the description of the lover/philosopher in Socrates' speech.

<sup>11</sup>In no other dialogue is the charge of *hybris* brought against Socrates, though in the *Cratylus* he playfully calls his views about names ὕβριστικά καὶ γελοῖα (426b6). The charge is found in identical words in the spurious *Alcibiades* (114d7), perhaps a direct borrowing.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Robin's "insolent." The only Platonic parallel for such a meaning is *Prot.* 355c8 (said of an imaginary interlocutor). Mockery and *hybris* are sometimes connected, as in the *Cratylus* passage cited above (note 11). For other examples of this use of *hybris* see now MacDowell 20–21.

*Symposium* of *hybris* and its derivatives (eight times)<sup>13</sup> indicates that Plato may be giving the word a special significance which develops within the context of the dialogue.

One instance precedes Agathon's accusation: when Socrates says that he is going to Agathon's banquet *καλὸς παρὰ καλόν*, he refers to a traditional proverb that "the good go unbidden to the feasts of the good" (174b4-5),<sup>14</sup> and adds that Homer probably destroyed and "committed *hybris* against" this proverb<sup>15</sup> by having Menelaus, a worse man, go to the feast of Agamemnon, the better man. Now *hybris* is certainly an odd term to apply to this sort of poetic error,<sup>16</sup> but one sense of the word may suggest a reason for its use here and a connection between this instance and Agathon's accusation.

*Hybris* generally indicates some sort of insolent violence.<sup>17</sup> The Athenian law against *hybris* apparently covered a wide range of offences relating to malicious assault, and it could sometimes refer specifically to sexual assault against a woman or a young boy (e.g., Thuc. 8.74.3).<sup>18</sup> But *hybris* also developed other related meanings, including that upon which our own use of the word is based, namely a deed of excess, an attempt to rise above one's proper place, or (as Phaedra's nurse expresses it) "the wish to be superior to the gods."<sup>19</sup> Thus although Homer's *hybris* is in one sense his "assault" on the proverb, his alteration also suggests this last sense of *hybris*, the attempt to be more than one really is: Homer attributes to Menelaus a status superior to his actual condition. Similarly Agathon accuses Socrates of the reverse crime, of claiming an ignorance which is not his. This is not to say that "false pretender" is a specific meaning of *hybristes*, but rather that both these instances of *hybris*, Homer's and Socrates', in some way involve false pretense, and it is

<sup>13</sup>174b6, 175e7, 181c4, 188a7, 215b7, 219c5, 221e3-4, 222a8.

<sup>14</sup>Reading ἀγαθῶν in 174b4.

<sup>15</sup>κινδυνεύει οὐ μόνον διαφθεῖραι ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑβρίσαι εἰς ταύτην τὴν παροιμίαν 174b5-6. For ὑβρίζω εἰς see LSJ, s.v., II.1.

<sup>16</sup>In *Phaedrus* 252b6 *hybristikón* is apparently used to refer to a verse which contains a metrical error (de Vries, *A Commentary on the Phaedrus of Plato* [Amsterdam 1969] *ad loc.*), although J. Henderson (*The Maculate Muse* [New Haven 1975] 128) and others take the reference to be to the salacious content of the verses.

<sup>17</sup>See R. Latimore, *Story Patterns in Greek Tragedy* (Ann Arbor 1964) 23-25.

<sup>18</sup>For the γραφή ὑβρέως see J. H. Lipsius, *Das attische Recht und Rechtsverfahren* [Leipzig 1905-15] 420-429. He concludes (423) that although the injury need not be purely physical, there must be actual, not merely verbal, damage. Dover's contention (note on *Clouds* 1068; also *Greek Popular Morality* [Oxford 1974] 54) that *hybris* is "treating a fellow citizen as if he were a slave or foreigner" is contradicted by the fact that one could commit *hybris* against a slave (see Dem. 21.46-50); cf. now MacDowell 23-24. For the sexual sense of *hybris* and its cognates in Aristophanes see Henderson (above, note 16) 159; on *hybris* as "lust" see MacDowell 17.

<sup>19</sup>ὑβρις τὰδ' ἐστί, κρείσσω δαιμόνων εἶναι θέλειν, *Hipp.* 474-75; cf. MacDowell 19-20.

possible that Plato intends us to be aware of this common element, although the significance of false pretense as an element of *hybris* in the *Symposium* will not become clear until later.

One more curious fact in this opening scene deserves our attention. After it is suggested that the topic of discussion for the evening be *eros*, Socrates declares that he has no objection, since "I claim to know nothing else but *ta erotika*" (177d7-8). We have already observed Socrates' traditional pretense of ignorance, which indeed is reaffirmed here; but what are we to make of his claim that he knows *ta erotika*? The claim is so unusual that we may wonder whether he is serious, but Socrates repeats it with emphasis later,<sup>20</sup> and his speech on the subject demonstrates that he does indeed know about "erotic matters." We shall see that in one sense this claim to knowledge may be understood as identical to his claim of ignorance; but there is also a sense in which Socrates truly does know something, and certainly his statement to this effect would strike the reader as thoroughly uncharacteristic.

The opening of the dialogue thus presents us with a highly unusual picture of Socrates, who washed and sandaled has made himself beautiful, who, in contrast to his customary assertion of ignorance, openly claims to know something, and who is accused of *hybris*. The connection between and significance of these features will become evident shortly when we examine Socrates' doctrine of *eros*.

First, however, we must briefly note two occurrences of *hybris* in the preliminary speeches. Pausanias' observation that Aphrodite Ourania is the older of the two Aphrodites and lacks *hybris* (ὑβρεως ἀμοίρου, 181c4) reminds us that *hybris* is normally characteristic of the young, and thus strengthens our feeling that it is an unlikely quality to attribute to Socrates. Secondly, Eryximachus, who takes over from Pausanias the doctrine of two *erotes*, says that when "the *eros* with *hybris*" rules, it causes much destruction and does wrong (ἡδίκησεν, 188a7-8). This reference indicates the harmful, destructive element always present in *hybris*.<sup>21</sup>

## II SOCRATES' DOCTRINE OF *Eros*

We must now briefly examine certain aspects of Socrates' doctrine of *eros* as presented in the dialogue.<sup>22</sup> The preliminary interrogation of Agathon establishes the basic elements of the doctrine, later confirmed (201e3-7), namely, that *eros* as desire implies a lack, specifically a lack of beauty, and that *eros* is thus not beautiful, as Agathon had maintained

<sup>20</sup>εἰδώς τὴν ἀλήθειαν (sc. about *eros*), 198d7; cf. 201d5, 212b6.

<sup>21</sup>As MacDowell concludes, "*hybris* is always bad" (21).

<sup>22</sup>The doctrine of *eros* is put in the mouth of Diotima, but since Socrates accepts it completely (212b), I will consider it his.

(201b4–12). We should note, furthermore, that Diotima describes the *daimon*, *eros*, as not only not beautiful, but also “unwashed and unsandaled” (αὐχμηρός<sup>23</sup> καὶ ἀνυπόδητος 203d1). In three respects, therefore, Diotima’s *eros* is unlike the beautiful, washed and sandaled Socrates at Agathon’s banquet.

Diotima next describes *eros* as a *metaxy*, a median between contraries, such as beauty and ugliness, or (most significant for us) between wisdom and ignorance (202a2–10, 203e5). The philosopher, moreover, is in a similarly intermediate position: he is not the one who knows but the one who is between ignorance and wisdom (204a1–b2). Diotima concludes that *eros*, the lover of wisdom, is therefore a philosopher (204b2–5); lacking knowledge he seeks it. The mistake which Socrates used to make and which Agathon makes at the banquet is to confuse the lover and the object of love (the “loved-one”) and to equate *eros* with the latter (ψήθης . . . τὸ ἐρώμενον “Ἐρωτα εἶναι οὐ τὸ ἐρῶν, 204c1–3). The object of love is beautiful and complete and blessed; the lover lacks all these qualities (204c4–6).

Socrates is satisfied with this description of *eros* and now turns (204c7–8) to the question of the operation of *eros* in human affairs. The long discussion of this subject culminates in the description of the progression of the lover/philosopher through various ascending stages from love of a single beautiful body to the final vision of the form of Beauty (210a4–212a7).<sup>24</sup> This vision brings the knowledge of beauty (ἐπιστήμη, 210d7; μάθημα, 211c7, c8), and “in the end one knows Beauty itself” (γνῶ αὐτὸ τελευτῶν δ’ ἐστι καλόν, 211c8–d1).<sup>25</sup> Thus the lover/philosopher, who begins in an intermediate state between ignorance and wisdom, by the end of his ascent has attained true knowledge. We may further conclude that since the lover/philosopher was defined as lacking beauty and knowledge, he will no longer be a lover/philosopher at the end of his journey when he possesses both of these.<sup>26</sup>

Although this conclusion is not explicitly drawn by Diotima, it is confirmed by the example of Socrates himself. We are told that he met with Diotima on several occasions (cf. 207a5–6) and that at first he was as ignorant as Agathon still is (201e3–5; cf. 206b5–6); he then learned from

<sup>23</sup>αὐχμηρός means literally “dry, dusty,” but when used of people, it means simply “dirty” (e.g., Eur. *Hel.* 1540).

<sup>24</sup>For an interesting analysis of the road to true Beauty and of the form of Beauty itself see Moravcsik, in J. Anton & G. Kustas, eds. *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy* (Albany 1971) 285–302.

<sup>25</sup>Note that the form of Beauty is not any one specific science (οὐδέ τις ἐπιστήμη, 211a7), but it is nonetheless clear that the final vision of Beauty involves knowledge of the Form.

<sup>26</sup>Note too that *eros* is a *daimon*, intermediate between gods and men (202d11–e1), but that at the end of his journey the lover/philosopher will be immortal, if anyone ever is (212a6–7).

Diotima about *ta erotika* (201d5, 207a5–6; cf. 209e5–210a4), which he now practices (212b6). Clearly there is an implicit identity between the imaginary person who is moving toward *ta erotika* (210e4) in Diotima's description of the progress of the lover/philosopher and Socrates, who has in earlier days moved by steps toward a true knowledge of *ta erotika* (cf. 177d7–8). There is still a certain paradox in Socrates' situation, since *ta erotika* can be connected with the earlier description of *eros* as lacking knowledge, and we may consequently wish to understand Socrates' claim to know *ta erotika* as essentially identical to his traditional claim to know only his own ignorance. On the other hand, Socrates' unqualified claim to know *ta erotika* (177d7–8), which is in striking contrast to his usual claim to know nothing, must indicate some positive degree of true knowledge. Moreover it is clear that only one who has seen the form of Beauty has knowledge in the most fundamental Platonic sense, knowledge of the Forms, and he not only knows Beauty but has also grasped the truth of *arete* (212a4–5), as Socrates apparently has (cf. 222a4).

We may thus infer that Socrates has reached the end of the lover/philosopher's journey, has had his own vision of true Beauty, and now possesses knowledge and virtue. This conclusion is nowhere explicitly stated, but it is confirmed by the physical appearance of Socrates at the banquet; his remarkable beauty, as we have seen, is in clear contrast to the un-beautiful *eros*, and this must be a physical manifestation of his knowledge (i.e., possession) of beauty (again, in contrast to the un-wise *eros*). In further contrast to dirty, barefoot *eros*, Socrates at the banquet is washed and sandaled. Thus it seems clear that the beautiful and wise Socrates is no longer a lover/philosopher, but must be a wise man and consequently an object of love.<sup>27</sup>

The question, whether Socrates at the banquet is a lover or a loved-one (as we have concluded he must be), is on the surface one of the ambiguities of the dialogue's dramatic action,<sup>28</sup> though it seems clear to me that whatever role he may assume, he is in truth an object of love.<sup>29</sup> To be sure, Alcibiades accuses him of having contrived to sit next to Agathon, the most beautiful person present (213c4–5); Socrates, moreover, assumes the role of Agathon's lover at the end when he appeals directly to Agathon to let no one part them, especially not Alcibiades, another would-be lover (222d4–223a9). But such verbal play can not be taken as evidence for Socrates' true nature, since Agathon and Alcibiades in fact pursue him

<sup>27</sup>In contrast to Socrates, his "lover" Aristodemus is unsandaled (173b2) and thus has the physical appearance of a lover/philosopher.

<sup>28</sup>Robin (cvii) sees the ambiguity of Socrates' being both lover and loved-one as "une énigme insoluble." Alcibiades' speech, however, enables us to understand in what sense Socrates is a lover (the traditional view) and in what sense he is a loved-one (the view I am developing here).

<sup>29</sup>One should remember that Socrates arrives and leaves with a lover, Aristodemus (see above, note 5), although nothing is made of their erotic relationship at the banquet.

as much as, if not more than, he pursues them. And the (admittedly subjective) impression that Socrates' posture as a lover is playful and assumed will be explicitly confirmed by Alcibiades in his speech, to which we must now turn.

### III SOCRATES' *Hybris*

It is generally agreed that Alcibiades' description of Socrates implicitly reveals him to be a true lover/philosopher. On this view the first six speeches culminate in Socrates' true portrayal of the ideal *eros*, and Alcibiades then praises Socrates instead of *eros* (214b9–d10), thereby indicating the identity of the two.<sup>30</sup> But although this view is consistent with Alcibiades' praise of Socrates, it is only part of the truth of the *Symposium*, for as we have noted, Alcibiades' speech is explicitly a mixture of praise and blame (222a7–8), and we must pay close attention to both sides of this duality if we wish fully to understand Socrates' complex nature.

The two aspects of Alcibiades' description of Socrates are clear from the beginning of his speech, where he draws the analogy between Socrates and the Silenus-figures, which are ugly on the outside but have statues of gods inside (215a6–b3): similarly, Socrates and his *logoi* are one thing on the outside but quite another thing when opened up (216d5–217a2, 221d7–222a6). This duality, moreover, has a specific bearing on the question of Socrates as a lover: others, says Alcibiades, see only the external Socrates, who is always erotically inclined toward beautiful people (ἐρωτικῶς διάκειται τῶν καλῶν, 216d2–3), but this is only his external "cloak." In fact Socrates has no concern for anyone beautiful (οὔτε εἴ τις καλὸς ἐστὶ μέλει αὐτῷ οὐδέν, 216d7–8); internally, that is, Socrates is not a lover.<sup>31</sup> He deceives others, however, by pretending to be a lover, when in fact he is a loved-one, not a lover (ἐξαπατῶν ὡς ἐραστὴς παιδικὰ μᾶλλον αὐτὸς καθίσταται ἀντ' ἐραστοῦ, 222b3–4). The same conclusion emerges in the central episode of Alcibiades' speech, the attempted seduction, for although at the time of the incident Socrates was called the lover (ἐραστὴς, 218c7), Alcibiades was in fact the lover, as he now admits (ἀτεχνῶς ὥσπερ ἐραστὴς παιδικοῖς ἐπιβουλεύων, 217c7–8).<sup>32</sup> Alcibiades' speech thus

<sup>30</sup>See above, note 2. There are also some significant parallels in language between Diotima's description of *eros* and Alcibiades' description of Socrates; see Bury lx–lxii and note on 223a (εὐπόρως).

<sup>31</sup>Most critics would understand Alcibiades' remarks as denying that Socrates is a lover only in a purely physical sense. Although this may be the primary sense, however, it is clear that the expanded use of *eros* and its derivatives in Diotima's speech can be (and on my level of interpretation must be) kept in mind in understanding Alcibiades' criticism.

<sup>32</sup>Even after his speech Alcibiades still seems to the audience to be in love with Socrates (222c2–3).



confirms the reader's impression that in spite of Socrates' external appearance, he is in fact a loved-one.<sup>33</sup>

Alcibiades also clarifies another related aspect of Socrates' dual nature, one we have already seen him display to Agathon (175e), namely that "he is ignorant in every respect and knows nothing, as is his pretense" (καὶ αὖ ἀγνοεῖ πάντα καὶ οὐδὲν οἶδεν, ὡς τὸ σχῆμα αὐτοῦ, 216d3-4).<sup>34</sup> This pretense of ignorance, moreover, reappears in Socrates' response to Alcibiades' attempted seduction (218d6-219b2): at the crucial moment when Alcibiades has unambiguously declared himself, Socrates, "in his usual ironic manner" (μᾶλα εἰρωνικῶς καὶ σφόδρα ἑαυτοῦ τε καὶ εἰωθότως, 218d6-7), pretends ignorance and suggests that they consider the matter in the future.<sup>35</sup> In truth, of course, Alcibiades knows that although Socrates' *logoi* appear laughable on the surface, when opened up they are found to be the only *logoi* which are truly intelligent (νοῦν ἔχοντας ἔνδον μόνους εὐρήσει τῶν λόγων, 222a2-3). The truth about Socrates then is that he appears on the surface to be ignorant and a lover, whereas in fact he possesses beauty and wisdom: in fact he is a loved-one, teeming with *sophrosyne* (216d7) and *arete* in general (222a4).

Now the specific aspect of Socrates' *arete* which Alcibiades describes at some length (219d3-221c1) is his military valor. The account illustrates Socrates' invulnerability to the many hardships of military life as well as to the dangers of battle itself.<sup>36</sup> Alcibiades particularly emphasizes Socrates' superiority to others: in enduring hardship he was superior (περιῆν, 219e8) not only to Alcibiades himself but to all others, and in remaining cool in battle he was superior (περιῆν, 221a7) even to the general, Laches. Such superiority is clearly praiseworthy, but one small episode (220b1-c1) suggests that it may also have a detrimental aspect. Once during a terrible cold spell Socrates was walking through the snow barefoot more easily than the others with their feet covered,<sup>37</sup> and his

<sup>33</sup>It is clear that although Socrates' external facade is an important part of his total character, his inner nature is truer and more real. For instance, it is serious (σπουδάσαντος δὲ αὐτοῦ, 216e5), whereas his external facade is only apparent and deceptive; the recurring imagery of the mysteries, moreover, reinforces the feeling that his inner nature, like the form of Beauty, contains the ultimate truth.

<sup>34</sup>Hug brackets καὶ αὖ . . . οἶδεν, calling it a "clumsy gloss," and Burnet punctuates with a full stop after οἶδεν. But Bury (note *ad loc.*) defends the text and punctuation I have given, which Robin also reads.

<sup>35</sup>To be more precise, Socrates does not directly assert his ignorance, but simply questions whether or not he has any knowledge. The effect of this, however, as Alcibiades points out, is the same as in cases where he maintains his ironic pretense of ignorance.

<sup>36</sup>Socrates' invulnerability in battle may recall his invulnerability to Alcibiades' "shafts" (βέλη, 219b4); cf. also 221b5-6, where Socrates does not let himself be touched.

<sup>37</sup>Note that we have here another instance of the barefoot Socrates. In this context, however, this detail emphasizes his superiority to others.

fellow-soldiers felt that by this behavior he was scorning them (ὡς καταφρονούντα σφῶν, 220c-1). That Socrates' superiority was perceived as scorn by the soldiers may seem quite natural, and this detail would not be remarkable if a similar reference to Socrates' scorn did not occur in connection with his *hybris*, which we must now examine.

Alcibiades directly accuses Socrates of *hybris* three times in his speech, at the beginning (215b7), at the end of the seduction episode (219c5), and at the end (222a8, cf. 221e3-4). In the first case the charge is unspecified and puzzling: "You are a *hybristes*, are you not?" (ὁβριστῆς εἶ: ἢ οὐ;). Socrates does not deny the charge, and Alcibiades, leaving us to wonder about the precise meaning of his accusation, turns to the specific comparison of Socrates' "piping" to that of Marsyas. The reference to Marsyas is suggestive, however, for he was a traditional example of *hybris* in the sense of "wishing to be superior to the gods" (see above, note 19): Marsyas' music was so superior to that of other mortals that he nearly outdid Apollo and was then flayed for this attempt to put himself on the level of the gods.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, Alcibiades later refers specifically to the "skin of a hybristic satyr" (221e3-4), but even this earlier reference to Marsyas may suggest that the very superiority of Socrates' "music" raises him above ordinary human limitations and thus makes him *hybristic*.<sup>39</sup>

Another clue to Socrates' *hybris* is found in the contrast between his external appearance as an ignorant lover and his inner virtue: the fact is, says Alcibiades, that a beautiful person is of no concern to Socrates, but he "scorns" (καταφρονεῖ, 216d8) such a one more than you can imagine. The scorn Socrates displays toward beautiful people is similar to the scorn perceived by his fellow-soldiers, and it also recalls a reference to scorn which we passed over in Diotima's description of the progress of the lover/philosopher. There she maintains that one who has advanced beyond the love of beautiful bodies scorns the earlier objects of his love (καταφρονήσαντα καὶ σμικρὸν ἡγησάμενον, 210b5-6; cf. 210c5-6).<sup>40</sup> In terms

<sup>38</sup>There are many different versions of the myth of Marsyas and Apollo; for references see Roscher's *Lexicon* 2.2441-2443.

<sup>39</sup>Of course as a satyr Marsyas' *hybris* may also be simply his "lust" (see above, note 18), and this is how Hug takes the reference in 221e3-4 ("die ὕβρις ist die augenfälligste Eigenschaft eines Satyrs"); cf. Pindar, *P.* 10.36, where *hybris* denotes an erect phallus, and the title of a satyr play of Sophocles: *Hybris*. However, since Marsyas was famous for his music not his lust, and since his music is the explicit point of the comparison with Socrates, his *hybris* must refer primarily to his superior music.

<sup>40</sup>Moravcsik ([above, note 24] 292) argues that a negative attitude toward objects that the lover/philosopher has already fully understood helps keep him moving ever upward. Diotima's remark is especially significant as the only evidence for the objective existence of the superior person's scorn, which otherwise is reported only by those who feel themselves scorned.

of Socrates' doctrine of *eros*, it is thus appropriate for him, now that he has reached a higher level, to scorn physical beauty. We shall have to consider, however, the effect of this scorn on others who have not progressed so far.

We now come to Socrates' one clear act of *hybris*, his refusal to have intercourse with Alcibiades. Four verbs describe this act from Alcibiades' point of view (219c3–5): Socrates "was superior to me (*περιεγένετο*),<sup>41</sup> he scorned me (*κατεφρόνησεν*), he mocked (*κατεγέλασεν*) my beauty, and he committed *hybris* (*ὑβρίσεν*)."<sup>42</sup> Here Socrates' *hybris* is linked directly to his superiority, which is also perceived as scorn and mockery,<sup>43</sup> just as his superior endurance is perceived as scorn by his fellow-soldiers. As in battle, moreover, Socrates' invulnerability in sexual affairs (see above, note 36) is quite admirable, and critics are not wrong to see it as an illustration of his superior moral worth; but for all his irony Alcibiades is also making a serious accusation, and we must not ignore its implications.<sup>44</sup>

Alcibiades concludes his speech by acknowledging that he has found fault with Socrates, specifically for his *hybris* (*ἄ με ὑβρίσεν*, 222a8), and he elaborates as follows (222a8–b4): "I am not the only one whom he treated in this way (*sc.* hybristically), but also Charmides, son of Glaucon, and Euthydemus, son of Diocles, and a great many others, whom he deceived into thinking him a lover, whereas he was in fact a loved-one instead of a lover." These words indicate that Socrates' *hybris* is directly related to his false pretense to be a lover, which, as we have seen, is essentially the same as his pretense of ignorance. This does not mean, however, that Socrates' *hybris* is only external, for it lies in his deception

<sup>41</sup>*περιγίγνεσθαι* here is equivalent to *περιεῖναι*, which in addition to the occurrences we have noted above (219e8, 221a7) is also used of Socrates in 222e7.

<sup>42</sup>Bury (note on 219c) says, "*ὑβρις* is a *vox propria* in erotic literature for the 'spretæ iniuria formæ,' " and cites two examples. The first (*Anth. Pal.* 5.213) is an epigram of Meleager, several centuries later than the *Symposium*, where if one accepts the emendation *οἷσει* (see Gow and Page, *Hellenistic Epigrams* [Cambridge 1965] 2.636), *ὑβρις* refers to an offense against *Eros*, not against the lover. The second is a fragment of Anacreon (= *PMG* 445), where the *Erotes* are called *ὑβρισταί* because they bring unrequited love upon the poet. Clearly neither of these cases is a true parallel. More to the point is the obvious and humorous irony in the charge of *hybris*, which normally would indicate that undesired sexual intercourse had taken place. Here, in contrast, Alcibiades' charge is that desired intercourse has not taken place.

<sup>43</sup>The ambiguity of Socrates' superiority is also indicated by the use of *ὑπερήφανος* ("superior"). In its first occurrence (217e5) it is ambiguous ("absichtlich zweideutig": Hug), but Alcibiades later uses the noun *ὑπερηφανία* (219c6) to designate the "crime" of which he is accusing Socrates.

<sup>44</sup>Plutarch (*Cato Maior* 7.1) concludes that Socrates is only hybristic on the outside (*ὁ Πλάτων τὸν Σωκράτην φησὶν ἔξωθεν ἰδιώτην καὶ σατυρικὸν καὶ ὑβριστὴν φαίνόμενον*). But it is in fact the revelation of Socrates' true inner nature that supports Alcibiades' accusation of *hybris*, which refers not to Socrates' external erotic appearance but to the inner truth of his non-erotic nature, not to a sexual attack but to a sexual retreat.

(ἐξαπατῶν, 222b3), that is, in the falsity of his external erotic appearance and the truth of his internal non-erotic (and superior) nature (see above, note 44).

Let us now recall Agathon's earlier accusation of *hybris* (175e7). This charge was directed precisely at Socrates' false pretense of ignorance, and it indicated Agathon's feeling that Socrates was mocking him. Agathon's accusation thus refers to the same combination of elements as Alcibiades', namely Socrates' false pretense to be a lover, his false pretense of ignorance, and his actual (inner) superiority. Each of these features is a part of Socrates' *hybris*: his superiority is *hybris* in the sense of rising higher than one's allotted station (cf. Menelaus and Marsyas), and his pretended inferiority injures others in that it is perceived as mockery and deception.

One may argue, of course, that Socrates' scorn only exists as a subjective feeling in the minds of those inferior to him (but cf. above, note 40), and that men such as Alcibiades injure themselves and should not therefore blame Socrates. But can we absolve Socrates of all responsibility for the consequences of his *hybris*? To answer this question we must consider more fully Alcibiades' failure, but first let us note one final instance of Socrates' superiority. After he finishes speaking, Alcibiades engages in an apparently playful rivalry with Socrates for the favor of Agathon. When he loses, he appeals to Zeus: "See how I suffer at the hands of this man [Socrates]! He thinks he must be superior (περιεῖναι) to me in everything . . . that's the way it always is; with Socrates around it's impossible for anyone else to get any share of the beautiful boys" (τῶν καλῶν μεταλαβεῖν, 222e6–7, 223a6–7).<sup>45</sup> Here Socrates again deprives Alcibiades of a share of that beauty which is the lover's primary desire. Moreover, Socrates is in fact a loved-one and thus does not partake of Agathon's beauty; he merely puts him to sleep and then leaves. By pretending to be a lover Socrates has again frustrated Alcibiades. One might say, of course, that this is for Alcibiades' own good, but does such frustration in fact benefit Alcibiades? Let us see what he himself says about it.

#### IV ALCIBIADES' FAILURE

We must first remember the historical background of the *Symposium*. Although Alcibiades was thought by many to be one of the most talented men of his time, after the end of the Peloponnesian War he was commonly regarded as having contributed largely to Athens' defeat.<sup>46</sup> A major

<sup>45</sup>In the context τῶν καλῶν must be masculine; but the more general neuter sense ("beautiful things") may also be suggested, especially since μεταλαμβάνω is a common Platonic term to indicate "participation" in the Forms (e.g., *Phaedo* 102b2, *Parm.* 131a4–5).

<sup>46</sup>Such is Thucydides' view (e.g., 6.15), and it seems to be shared by Xenophon (*Mem.* 1.2.12–13).

event in his downfall occurred just before the sailing of the Sicilian expedition in 415 (and shortly after Agathon's banquet in 416), when he apparently was involved in the mutilation of some Herms and the revelation of certain mysteries. It is clear, moreover, that an important underlying cause of Socrates' prosecution under the restored democracy in 399 was his earlier association with Alcibiades and Critias, and Xenophon's defense of Socrates includes a section absolving him of responsibility for the behavior of these two friends (*Mem.* 1.2.12-48).<sup>47</sup> Plato nowhere explicitly defends Socrates against the charge of corrupting Alcibiades. Does the *Symposium*, as many have thought,<sup>48</sup> implicitly provide such a defense by absolving Socrates of responsibility for Alcibiades' career? Let us consider more closely the reasons for Alcibiades' failure.

In the *Symposium* Alcibiades tries to be a lover not only at the banquet where he fails in the end to get any share of Agathon's beauty, but also in his attempted seduction of Socrates. In this attempt Alcibiades behaves as a lover should, according to Diotima, for he seeks not only Socrates' beauty but also his knowledge,<sup>49</sup> and he also seeks Socrates' assistance in becoming as good as possible (218d2). Thus Alcibiades as a lover seeks beauty, knowledge and virtue, all of which are possessed by Socrates, the loved-one. But by failure to consummate the affair, he fails to gain any of these objects of his desire; and as we have seen, this failure is at least partly the result of Socrates' *hybris*.

Now Alcibiades also fails as a political figure, and although the reasons for this failure are more complex, it too is in part traceable to Socrates. In his own analysis (215d6-216c3) Alcibiades sees himself torn between the attraction of Socrates' intellectual and moral advice and the force of popular glory. Knowing that he can not refute Socrates' demonstration of his intellectual neediness, he reacts in the only way possible: he avoids Socrates, stopping up his ears as if to protect himself from the charming song of the Sirens (216a6-7),<sup>50</sup> and although ashamed at his behavior, he yields, nonetheless, to the attraction of political glory. His reasons for rejecting a life of philosophy are not made clear until the seduction episode, which follows immediately (217a2-219d2) and which reveals the true nature of his relation with Socrates, namely that he was frustrated in his past attempt to acquire beauty, wisdom, and virtue from Socrates,

<sup>47</sup>According to Isocrates (*Busiris* 5) one of the charges in Polycrates' *Accusation of Socrates* was that Alcibiades had been a pupil of Socrates. Cf. Xen., *Mem.* 1.2.12.

<sup>48</sup>See, e.g., Robin x-xi, xcvi-c.

<sup>49</sup>By gratifying Socrates Alcibiades hopes to hear "everything he knows" (217a4-5), and Socrates is aware that Alcibiades is seeking the truth of beauty in exchange for opinion (*ἀντὶ δόξης ἀλήθειαν καλῶν*, 218e6).

<sup>50</sup>Like Socrates, the Sirens also held out a promise of knowledge (*Od.* 12.184-191).

and that this frustration, which he still feels, is a direct result of Socrates' *hybris*.

We may recall that Agathon was similarly frustrated by Socrates' *hybris* in his attempt to learn from him (175c-e). Two other individuals, moreover, Charmides and Euthydemus,<sup>51</sup> are called victims of Socrates' *hybris* (222b1-2), and one of these had a career rather similar to Alcibiades': Plato's uncle, Charmides, was also a pupil and perhaps a loved-one of Socrates,<sup>52</sup> but he abandoned philosophy for a career in politics, where he was a leader of the hated Thirty, who overthrew the democracy in 404 and ruled Athens for eight months before being overthrown in turn. Charmides is thus another example of Socrates' failure to produce intellectual or moral improvement in the promising young men with whom he associates.

Alcibiades' failure then is typical, and we are led to ask why those who associate with Socrates fail as lover/philosophers? On the basis of Socrates' doctrine of *eros*, one could answer that such failure is entirely the lover's own fault, since he himself must provide the impetus for attaining the object of his desire. The lover may have a leader or guide to show him the way, as Socrates had Diotima,<sup>53</sup> but he himself must continually strive to gain each desired objective in turn. From this point of view one might maintain that Alcibiades goes astray by not being sure of what he wants, by not pursuing his goals in proper order, or by a failure of will or desire, and that Socrates' responsibility is consequently naught.

But such a view seems clearly inadequate, for it fails to account for the intense frustration produced by Socrates' *hybris*, a frustration which causes even his admirers, such as Alcibiades, to blame him and turn away from him in spite of their admiration. At the very least, I think, the *Symposium* shows that when a successful lover/philosopher, such as Socrates, achieves the goal of true knowledge of Beauty and thus becomes a wise man, he becomes separated in his superiority from other men who are still in the early stages of love and philosophy, and that because of

<sup>51</sup>Concerning Euthydemus, son of Diocles (not to be confused with the sophist of the same name), we know nothing, unless we can identify him with Critias' beloved or Socrates' interlocutor in the *Memorabilia* (1.2.29-30; 4.2-3, 4.5-6); see *RE* 6.1504, *s.v.* Euthydemus (12).

<sup>52</sup>See Plato's *Charmides passim*. According to Xenophon (*Mem.* 3.7) Socrates urged Charmides to take a greater part in public life.

<sup>53</sup>It is unclear in Diotima's account whether the lover/philosopher ought to have a guide or teacher. Most of her description of the lover/philosopher's progress omits mention of any guide or teacher, but toward the end there are several references to a guide (210a6-7, 210e2-3), and at one point (211b7-c1) Diotima says that the lover/philosopher either proceeds toward *ta erotika* (*sc.* on his own) or is led by someone else. Note also that Socrates once speaks of his need for a teacher (207c5-6), and that he himself, the only example of a successful lover/philosopher, has a teacher.

this separation, in addition to being an attractive object of their desire he also frustrates and repels this desire. Moreover, if Socrates tries to put himself on the level of others by ironically pretending ignorance, this false pretense is easily discovered, and it too has a harmful effect upon others.

That Socrates must bear some responsibility for the failure of Alcibiades and others is also suggested by the contrast between him and Diotima. As teachers, both know *ta erotika* and both have pupils who wish to learn from them. One might claim that Diotima's pupil is more willing or more able than Socrates' pupils, but one must also admit that she displays little if any of the ironic pretense or scorn we see in him, and that she clearly seems intent on satisfying, not frustrating, her pupil's desire.<sup>54</sup> Thus the imaginary Diotima seems to be presented as an example of the perfect teacher, whereas Socrates, though perhaps the perfect learner (the perfect lover/philosopher) clearly has his faults as a teacher.

This is the conclusion we must draw, as Vlastos has argued (above, note 1), from the early dialogues, and it is further confirmed in the dramatic events of the *Symposium*. In this dialogue we are presented with only one example of successful learning, namely Socrates, who has learned about *eros* from Diotima. No one else, however, learns anything. They have all, we are told by Alcibiades (217e6–218b5), felt the “snake bite” of Socrates in the past, but it is clear from their speeches that none has learned even the preliminary elements of the truth of Beauty, and as far as we can tell, no one learns from Socrates' speech at the banquet. When he is finished, some praise the speech (212c4), though not so enthusiastically as they applauded Agathon (198a1–3), and Aristophanes points out a reference to his own speech (212c4–6). But no one is persuaded to turn away from his love partner and start on the upward path to true Beauty,<sup>55</sup> and in spite of Socrates' arguments (in 198b1–199b5) Eryximachus refers without comment to the accepted view of the other speakers that a speech praising *eros* should be as beautiful as possible (214c1). After Alcibiades' speech everyone either goes home or falls asleep listening to Socrates' arguments about tragedy and comedy. Finally, when at last Socrates leaves, he is accompanied only by the lover/philosopher Aristodemus. This disciple and the fanatic<sup>56</sup> Apollodorus are the only examples of active lover/philosophers at the banquet,

<sup>54</sup>To be sure Diotima laughs at Socrates' ignorance (202b10), playfully rebukes him for it (204b1), and once remarks, “even you” might be initiated (209e5—Bury's description of *καὶν σὺ* as “contemptuous” [note *ad loc.*] is too strong). But Diotima always answers his questions, often more fully than he requests, and she only uses the “Socratic” method of elenchus constructively and for brief periods of time.

<sup>55</sup>One of the pairs of lovers at the banquet, Phaedrus and Eryximachus, apparently leave together (223b6–8).

<sup>56</sup>Whether or not one reads *μανικός* in 173d8 (see Bury *ad loc.* and lxxvi) does not substantially affect the picture of Apollodorus, for whom see also *Phaedo* 117d.

and if these are examples of Socrates' success, they do little to raise our estimate of him as a teacher.

It thus seems legitimate to conclude that the educational theory which emerges from Socrates' doctrine of *eros* and which seems to be embodied in Socrates himself has, in spite of its advantages, certain inherent difficulties. Although it permits the perfect learner (perhaps by finding the perfect teacher) to attain ultimate knowledge of the Forms, by placing most of the burden of learning on the learner himself it seems to ensure that most who seek to learn will fail. The ones who succeed, moreover, will be unable to prevent their pupils' failures and may even help cause them. In this regard, Socrates' doctrine of *eros* is just as self-serving as the doctrines of the five earlier speakers: it justifies his own career as a perfect example of the lover/philosopher's progress, while at the same time implying that others who do not succeed have only themselves to blame. From his own speech Socrates emerges as the only incarnation of *eros*, the only perfect lover.

But a different truth about Socrates and his doctrine of *eros* is revealed by Alcibiades, who while admitting Socrates' personal achievement, also makes us understand that this success has put him on a level above and apart from others and has made him *hybristic* in his relations with others. In his own terms and for himself Socrates has been a success, a success inspired by his *eros*; but as a teacher of others, Alcibiades reveals, Socrates is a failure, in Vlastos' words, "a failure of love." Of course Socrates' failure in a physical sense to consummate his love affair with Alcibiades is relatively unimportant in itself, but the episode (with the rest of Alcibiades' speech) reveals in a larger sense both Socrates' failure to remain the lover he once was and also the failure of his doctrine of *eros*. This is not to deny the brilliance of the doctrine on a theoretical level; but to the extent that Alcibiades' failure is also Socrates' failure, the doctrine on a practical level has significant faults.

That Plato is aware of these faults is indicated, I think, by the further stage in the life of the lover/philosopher which is added in the *Republic*, namely the obligation on the part of those who have seen the truth to descend back into the cave and turn the heads of those still trapped in darkness. Whether Plato ever adequately dealt with this final stage is questionable, and lies beyond the scope of this paper. But all teachers are confronted with similar questions: to what extent can we or should we teach those who seem not to want to learn, and should we feel any responsibility for a student's failure. Socrates' theory can provide a comfortable support for those who see their own responsibility as naught, but should we not also listen to the voice of Alcibiades?