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Oikeion, *Agathon*, and *Archaia Phusis* in Plato's *Symposium*

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Abstract: In this paper, I show that Aristophanes's speech in Plato's *Symposium* is tied into an interesting and hitherto unexplored web of ideas in Plato's ethics and psychology. The poet's analysis of *erōs* as 'leading us to what "belongs" (the *oikeion*)' (193d2) and as 'restoring us in our "original nature" (*archaia phusis*)' (193d4) is not a mere negative contribution that renders him a 'target for Diotima's fire' (Dover). Rather, he unwittingly communicates central ethical and psychological ideas which we find developed in key passages of Plato's dialogues. What is interesting is that Diotima in a curious passage seems to dismiss his contribution of the *oikeion* as unrelated to our good (*agathon*) and irrelevant to the analysis of desire (205d10–206a1). I argue that this interpretation of Diotima's response to Aristophanes, which would render her position an ethical anomaly in Plato's dialogues, should be rejected. Instead, it is more plausible to read her response as proposing a revisionary conception of the *oikeion*, relying on the idea that our *agathon* is our true *oikeion*. In addition, I tentatively suggest that the theory of psychic pregnancy may be seen as presenting the *agathon* of wisdom of virtue produced in the ascent as an *oikeion*. Just as fascinating as Diotima's stance on the *oikeion* is the question how her teachings relate to the concept of an *archaia phusis* of the soul. The idea that the soul's self-perfection constitutes a return to a temporally prior condition of excellence, which in two places other than the *Symposium* (*Republic* X, *Timaeus*) is called the '*archaia phusis*', is pervasive and centrally important to Plato's psychology. I address the question whether Diotima's ascent passage constitutes a psychological anomaly in portraying self-perfection as unrelated to the concept of the *archaia phusis*. I argue that an answer to this depends on the stance we take on the *Symposium*'s position regarding the immortality of the soul. While a reading that posits a rejection of immortality in the *Symposium* must indeed deny a role for the concept in Diotima's speech, I show that a reading allowing for immortality as a theoretical commitment in the background has an interesting interpretative option: along with *Timaeus* 90d5, it may fruitfully interpret the ascent as an ordering of the soul 'in accordance with its *archaia phusis*'.

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> *Im Grunde ist es nur die einfache Besinnung auf den Aretē -Begriff, das angespannte Erdenken dessen, was Aretē eigentlich ist, welches auch diese besondere Aretē als ein unveräußerliches οἰκεῖον erweist.*
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> Krämer 1959, 51.

Diotima's speech in the *Symposium* (201d1–212c3) presents a special challenge to the interpreter of Plato.[1] On the one hand, it is considered a *locus classicus* for the middle-period conception of Platonic forms, and resembles the *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Phaedrus* in portraying self-perfection as an ascent to wisdom and virtue.[2] On the other hand, a number of seeming anomalies make it stand out from its peers: in place of recollection, Diotima presents a theory of psychic pregnancy;[3] instead of proper immortality, she focuses on vicarious immortality through physical and psychic offspring;[4] instead of tripartition, Diotima relies according to some scholars on an earlier, 'Socratic' psychology.[5]

In this paper, I discuss a potential *ethical* anomaly that has hitherto received little attention in the literature. It arises in the context of a curious passage (205d10–206a1) in which Diotima engages with a rival theory according to which the object of *erōs* is not the good (*agathon*) but what 'belongs' (is *oikeion*) – a view underlying Aristophanes's earlier speech (189c2–193d5). On a superficial reading of the passage, Diotima dismisses the *oikeion* out of hand as irrelevant to the analysis of desire, which is instead caused and explained by the *agathon*. Diotima's

1 I thank Dominic Scott, Ursula Coope, Thornton Lockwood, Christoph Horn, George Karamanolis, Alexander Bown, David Meißner, Quinton Gardiner, Sophia Crüwell, the anonymous reviewers at *Apeiron*, as well as the audiences at the Cambridge Graduate Conference in Ancient Philosophy, the Oxford Ockham Society, and the Doktorandenkolloquium at the University of Bonn for helpful feedback on various iterations of this paper. I also thank Luca Castagnoli and Gábor Betegh for feedback on the relevant sections of my Oxford doctoral thesis, on which this paper is based.

2 For the division of Plato's dialogues into three broad periods, see Kahn 2002. My argument does not depend on a substantial developmentalist theory of Plato's dialogues. I nevertheless view the four 'middle period' dialogues *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, *Republic*, and *Phaedrus* as belonging together: independently from the chronological evidence, they clearly look towards and illuminate each other in a way that gives rise to a relatively close web of concepts, warranting comparative study such as the one undertaken in this paper.

3 On the relationship between the two theories, see Section 2.4 and especially Section 3.2, where I address the supposed 'anomalous' character of psychic pregnancy.

4 On the question of whether the *Symposium*'s account is compatible with the immortality of the soul, see Section 3.2.

5 On this issue, see Section 1.2, note 24.

juxtaposition of her own '*agathon* theory' with Aristophanes's '*oikeion* theory', and the 'dismissal reading' of her response, are the subject of the First Part of this paper.

As I demonstrate in the Second Part, such a complete rejection of the *oikeion* would render the *Symposium* an anomaly, as Plato in key passages of his dialogues establishes a connection precisely between our *agathon* – identified with wisdom and virtue – and our *oikeion*. However, I show that we do not have to accept this anomaly. It is more plausible to interpret the passage 205d10–206a1 not as dismissing the *oikeion* wholesale, but as suggesting a revised conception according to which our *agathon* is our true *oikeion*. More tentatively, I argue that the language of psychic pregnancy may be interpreted as positive evidence that the *agathon* of wisdom and virtue produced at the height of the ascent is something that intimately belongs (is *oikeion*) to us by nature.

These reflections reveal that the poet Aristophanes, who introduces the concept of the *oikeion* to the *Symposium*'s discussion, communicates a deeply held Platonic conviction when he characterizes *erōs* as 'leading us to the *oikeion*' (193d2). Indeed, it turns out that the poet's contribution is unwittingly tied into a whole nexus of Platonic ideas as he also claims that in leading us to the *oikeion*, *erōs* helps to 'restore us in our *archaia phusis*' (193d4). It is a central feature of Plato's thought that the soul's self-perfection ultimately constitutes the return to a temporally prior condition of excellence, which in two places (*Republic* 611c7–d1, *Timaeus* 90d5) is referred to by the originally Hippocratic concept of the '*archaia phusis*'. Here, however, we encounter a second potential anomaly, this time *psychological*: what do we make of the fact that Diotima, in the very dialogue in which Aristophanes introduces the concept of the *archaia phusis*, presents an account that does not portray self-perfection as a restoration of our original nature? In the Third Part, I turn to this question and consider a possible response.

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While the seemingly anomalous nature of Diotima's speech regarding the roles of both the *oikeion* and the *archaia phusis* serves as the starting point for these reflections, the subsequent investigation sheds light on a range of broader ethical and psychological issues in the *Symposium* and beyond. It offers fresh insights into the precise relationship between Aristophanes's and Diotima's theories of erotic desire, pinpoints the specific aspects of Aristophanes's account that Diotima critiques, and explains how her revisionary suggestions address these concerns. It also explores the extent to which the production of true wisdom and virtue in the ascent may plausibly be interpreted as a recovery of an intrinsic *oikeion*. In addition, the paper offers an account of the previously underexplored, originally Hippocratic concept of the *archaia phusis* and its philosophical applications in the *Symposium*, *Republic*, and *Timaeus*.

By contextualizing Diotima's response within Plato's broader discussions of the *oikeion*, *agathon*, and *archaia phusis*, I hope to contribute to a more systematic understanding of Plato's theories of desire and self-perfection. What we truly desire (wisdom and true virtue) is indeed something that intimately belongs to us, not something alien or unrelated to our nature. However, this inalienable *oikeion* is in fact identical with our *agathon*, and it is its *goodness* that explains both its 'belonging' to us and its desirability. On the picture we get from most other discussions in Plato, the soul's erotic desire for its *oikeion agathon* ultimately draws it to the full restoration of its *archaia phusis* after disembodiment. It is instructive to consider what role, if any, this concept of an *archaia phusis* may play in Diotima's speech with its staunch focus on the here below.

1 What Causes and Explains Desire? Diotima's Criticism of Aristophanes and his *Oikeion* Theory

Socrates presents his speech in the *Symposium* as a report of teachings allegedly delivered to him by the Mantinean prophetess Diotima. Following Agathon's earlier advice (195a1–5), he first clarifies the nature (*phusis*, 201e8–204c6) and then the workings (*ergon*, 204c7–212a7) of *erōs*. The latter discussion starts with a reflection on the *object* of *erōs* (204c7–206a13), culminating in the conclusion that *erōs* desires the permanent possession of the good (206a11–12).[6] *En route* to this conclusion, however, Diotima engages with a conception of the object of *erōs* that differs from hers in important respects:

> 'Now there's a certain story that's told,' she said, 'that it's those who seek their other half that are in love. But my story says that love is of neither half nor whole, unless it turns out, my friend, to be *good* (*agathon*): for people are willing to have even their legs and arms cut off if they think they're in a bad state. Because it's not, I think, what is their own that either group embraces, unless one calls the *good* (*agathon*) "belonging" (*oikeion*) and "one's own", and the bad (*kakon*) "alien" (*allotrion*). Since there is nothing else that people love except the good (*agathon*).'
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> Καὶ λέγεται μέν γέ τις, ἔφη, λόγος, ὡς οἳ ἂν τὸ ἥμισυ ἑαυτῶν ζητῶσιν, οὗτοι ἐρῶσιν· ὁ δ' ἐμὸς λόγος οὔτε ἡμίσεός φησιν εἶναι τὸν ἔρωτα οὔτε ὅλου, ἐὰν μὴ τυγχάνῃ γέ που, ὦ ἑταῖρε, ἀγαθὸν ὄν, ἐπεὶ αὐτῶν γε καὶ πόδας καὶ χεῖρας ἐθέλουσιν ἀποτέμνεσθαι οἱ ἄνθρωποι, ἐὰν αὐτοῖς δοκῇ τὰ ἑαυτῶν πονηρὰ εἶναι. οὐ γὰρ τὸ ἑαυτῶν οἶμαι ἕκαστοι ἀσπάζονται, εἰ μὴ εἴ τις τὸ μὲν ἀγαθὸν οἰκεῖον καλεῖ καὶ ἑαυτοῦ, τὸ δὲ κακὸν ἀλλότριον· ὡς οὐδέν γε ἄλλο ἐστὶν οὗ ἐρῶσιν ἄνθρωποι ἢ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ.
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> *Symposium* 205d10–206a1[7]

6 I discuss the claim that *erōs* desires the good in Section 1.2 below.

7 My translation, based on Rowe 1998. Unless otherwise noted, all other translations of the *Symposium* follow Rowe, with emendations. For the Greek text of the *Sympoisum*, I use Burnet's 1901 edition.

This passage is intriguing, for a number of reasons. For one thing, it is a thinly veiled response to the poet Aristophanes,[8] whose earlier speech (189c2–193d5) relied on a conception of *erōs* as desiring what 'belongs' (is *oikeion*) to us.[9] Since Diotima cannot have witnessed this speech, Socrates is clearly breaking character here. This does not go unnoticed, as the poet himself later attempts to reply to the mention 'Socrates' (not 'Diotima'!) has made to his speech (212c5–6). Although Socrates's speech picks up and develops elements of *all* previous contributions, the pretence of him merely reporting Diotima's teachings is nowhere as blatantly called into question as here.[10]

But our passage is not just a criticism of Aristophanes and the particulars of his story. Rather, Socrates has Diotima engage with the poet's general underlying conception of *erōs*, pointing out problems faced by *any* account that seeks the cause and explanation of *erōs* in the object's 'belonging' to the agent.[11] Although the brevity of the passage may make it seem like a side note, Diotima's juxtaposition of her own '*agathon* theory' with such an '*oikeion* theory' enriches her account as it contrasts her position with a view that holds powerful intuitive appeal. Aristophanes's story resonates with readers to this day because they feel that it captures something essential about the experience of *erōs*. When Diotima addresses the place of the *oikeion* in a theory of *erōs*, this should therefore be of interest to anyone with a philosophical interest in the phenomenon.

Beyond the *Symposium* and its discussion of *erōs*, the passage also holds special interest to the systematically inclined reader of Plato. As I demonstrate in the Second

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8 See Bury 1932, Fowler 1904, Dover 1980, Nehamas and Woodruff 1989, and Rowe 1998 *ad loc*, Sheffield 2006, 111, Sier 1997, 104. I analyse the relation between Diotima's presentation of the *oikeion* theory and Aristophanes's account in Section 1.1 below.

9 The Greek adjective οἰκεῖος originally just means 'in or of the house'; of things, it expresses (a) personal property in the sense of 'one's own'; of persons, it denotes (b) kinship, someone of the same household or a close friend; it can also stand for something that is (c) proper, fitting or suitable to something. The opposite is ἀλλότριος: 'alien', 'foreign', 'strange'. Cf. LSJ s.v. οἰκεῖος (Liddell, Scott and Jones 1940).

10 The role of the speakers before Socrates has been the subject of changing evaluations. On the 'classical interpretation', these stylized representations of expert views in Greek popular and scientific thought should be read as irrelevant or at least fundamentally mistaken. They would thus be mere negative contributions in need of refutation and correction by Socrates. An exponent is Rowe 1998, 8. More recently, the view that each speaker contributes some insight to a developing account has gained support and can now be counted as prevalent. See Sheffield 2006b and in particular 2006a. Cf. Sedley 2006.

In this paper, I argue that Aristophanes unwittingly introduces a nexus of concepts central to Plato's own ethics and psychology in the *Symposium* and beyond. For other studies asserting a positive role of Aristophanes's account (albeit with widely varying views as to what that role is), see Nussbaum 2001 (1986), 171–6, Carvalho 2009, Manuwald 2012, Destrée 2015, Obdrzalek 2017, and Sedley 2017. *Pace* Bury 1932, Dover 1966, 1980, and Rowe 1998, 9.

11 I engage with a possible objection to this interpretation in Section 1.3 below.

Part of this paper, the relationship between the *oikeion* and the *agathon* is a pervasive theme in key Platonic passages.[12] Aristophanes's story and Diotima's response tie into these reflections in interesting ways. Depending on how we interpret Diotima's criticism of Aristophanes and the *oikeion*, the question arises whether her position is compatible with these discussions, or whether it stands alone as an anomaly in the Platonic *corpus*.

Before we get to these wider implications of our passage, however, we need to elucidate what exactly is at issue. This is the task of Part 1. I begin by looking at the *oikeion* theory of *erōs* as it is characterized and criticized by Diotima, and how it relates to Aristophanes's speech (Section 1.1). I then consider Diotima's *agathon* theory as it emerges over the course of her speech and as she pits it against the *oikeion* theory in our passage (Section 1.2). After addressing a potential objection to my analysis (Section 1.3), I turn to the question of precisely what Diotima's criticism of Aristophanes's contribution of the *oikeion* is. I approach this question by presenting what may initially seem the most plausible interpretation. According to this 'dismissal reading' of Diotima's response, she rejects the *oikeion* wholesale as unconnected to the *agathon* and irrelevant to the analysis of desire (Section 1.4). This sets us up for Part 2, in which I consider the implications of such a reading, and reasons for adopting an alternative interpretation of her response.

1.1 The *Oikeion* Theory of *Erōs* and Aristophanes's Speech

According to the *oikeion* theory of *erōs* as it is characterized by Diotima, *erōs* arises in a subject that feels incomplete ('half') because it lacks an object it considers 'belonging' to it (its 'other half'). The subject then pursues this object with the aim of becoming complete and whole. More formally, a subject *a* desires an object *b* if, and only if:

(O1) the subject does not possess its object (and is aware of this lack); and

(O2) the subject considers the object as 'belonging' (*oikeion*) to it.[13]

Moreover,

(O3) it is this very appearance of 'belonging' that causes and explains its desirability.

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12 For an overview, see Section 2.1 below.

13 For a related analysis of desire as based in lack, cf. *Lysis* 221d6–e5. I discuss this in Section 2.1 below.

This sounds suspiciously similar to the conception of *erōs* underlying Aristophanes's speech (189c2–193d5). In the poet's story, human nature is described as moving from primordial integrity to current incompleteness and, hopefully, back to integrity in the future. In its complete state – symbolized by spherical and circular shape – it is called our 'original nature' (*archaia phusis*, 191d1–2; 192e9; 193c5; 193d4).[14] The *archaia phusis* is contrasted with our current state of deficiency. We miss the matching tally (*sumbolon*, 191d4, 5) that would complete us and restore our *archaia phusis*. Our other half 'belongs' (is *oikeion*, 193d2) to us because it formed part of our original nature. *Erōs*, the healer of human nature (189c9; 191d3; 193d5), promises restoration of our *archaia phusis* by leading us to the *oikeion*.

Diotima's presentation of the *oikeion* theory clearly captures central features of Aristophanes's account. At the same time, it makes two generalizations. The first concerns the scope of *erōs*: Aristophanes only considers the phenomenon of interpersonal love (specific *erōs*) and limits the *oikeion* to the person that is our unique matching counterpart. Diotima, by contrast, discusses the *oikeion* theory as an account of all classes of desire that would fall under her novel generic *erōs* (205a5–d9). Her example of diseased limbs shows that we have left behind interpersonal love.[15] The second generalization concerns the cause and explanation of 'belongingness'. Aristophanes grounds being *oikeion* in prior union in the *archaia phusis*. Diotima in her presentation of the *oikeion* theory leaves it open how 'belongingness' is grounded.[16]

1.2 The *Agathon* Theory of *Erōs* and Diotima's Speech

In whichever way we may interpret Diotima's criticism of Aristophanes and his concept of the *oikeion*,[17] one thing seems clear: she is adamant that it is the *good* (*agathon*) – and not, as Aristophanes would have it, the *oikeion* – that is the primary object of *erōs*. In fact, we can summarize Diotima's main points in a schematic '*agathon* theory of *erōs*'. This theory suggests that a subject *a* desires an object *b* if, and only if:

(A1) the subject does not possess its object (and is aware of this lack); and

(A2) the subject considers the object to be good (*agathon*).

14 I have more to say about the concept of the *archaia phusis* in Part 3 below.

15 There is a possible alternative explanation for Diotima's aim in generalizing Aristophanes's account, which I discuss in Section 1.3 below.

16 As prior possession does not explicitly feature in Diotima's discussion, I postpone my discussion of the *archaia phusis* until Part 3 below.

17 I turn to this question in Section 1.4 and Part 2 below.

Moreover,

> (A3) it is this very appearance of 'goodness' that causes and explains its desirability.

Requirement A1 was a central theme in Socrates's *elenchus* of Agathon (199c3–201c9), and is developed in the beginning stages of his reported discussion with Diotima. *Erōs* is a kind of desire. The subject of any desire must be deficient in its object. This deficiency can at the same time not be total, since in that case we would have no desire for what we lack. Human nature is essentially 'in-between' (*metaxu*) – neither good nor bad, neither beautiful nor ugly, neither ignorant nor wise (201e8–204c6).[18] We are erotic beings precisely because we lack yet desire the state of full possession of these qualities, longing for the divine happiness associated with them.

Requirements A2 and A3 have been the subject of the discussion leading up to our passage. Socrates cannot explain why *erōs* desires beautiful things. He is better placed to answer when Diotima proposes to substitute the *good* (*agathon*) for the beautiful:[19] we desire good things because their possession is constitutive of happiness. The attainment of happiness, in turn, is a complete explanation of our desire: there is no point in asking for the sake of which further end we desire happiness (204c7–205a4).[20] Diotima adds that, while *erōs* in its ordinary-language sense is confined to interpersonal love, this is only a specific, not the generic sense of the concept. Generic *erōs* covers the whole range of human goal-oriented pursuits, including money-making, the love of exercise, and philosophy (205a5–d9). People pursuing all these ways of life are driven by *erōs*, 'the whole of desire for good things and for happiness' (205d2). When our passage claims that 'there is nothing else that people love except the good' (205e7–206a1), it thus reaffirms what has been established earlier.

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We should note, however, that the earlier discussion mainly identified 'good things' (*ta agatha*) in the plural as the object of *erōs*. What is the significance of the shift to 'the good' (*to agathon*) in the singular? I contend that this change primarily marks an increase in abstraction. From the various objects taken to be goods, and the competing conceptions of the good, the discussion moves to the formally identical object common to all.[21] It is on this more abstract level that Diotima contrasts her *agathon* theory with the *oikeion* theory.

18 See Frede 1993, *passim*.

19 For a possible rationale for this supplementation, see Gerson 2006, 59.

20 In Gregory Vlastos's famous characterization, happiness (*eudaimonia*) is the 'question-stopper' (1991, 208).

21 Cf. Sier 1997, 217.

Nevertheless, the introduction of 'the good' raises a question: does Diotima consider the *apparent* or the *true* good as the object of *erōs*? There is definitely a sense in which her speech characterizes *erōs* as directed at the apparent good. As we have just seen, the discussion of generic *erōs* contrasts competing ways in which people pursue 'good things and happiness' (205d1–9). The ascent (209e5–212a7) then reveals most manifestations of *erōs* as missing the mark of true goodness. There is however also a sense in which Diotima ascribes to *erōs* a privileged relation to the *true* good. The analysis of *erōs* as rooted in humanity's intermediate status between good and bad is clearly concerned with our situation *vis-à-vis* an objective good, not towards varying subjective appearances of it. The ascent moreover suggests that *erōs* only properly fulfils its function as 'workmate of human nature' (212b3–4) when humanity attains the true good of wisdom and virtue.

I contend that there is a sense in which both claims, that *erōs* is for the apparent good, and that *erōs* is for the true good, apply and can be reconciled. Indeed, this tension is not exclusive to the *Symposium* but holds more generally of Plato's realist conception of desire: there is an objective good which we desire *even if we fail to correctly identify it* (*Republic* 505e1–5).[22] The 'intended object' of *erōs* is the real good, even if the 'actual object'[23] we pursue because it appears good to us is not in fact good.[24] By illustrating how *erōs* drives us toward the apparent good as its actual object, Diotima can accommodate a wide variety of human goal-oriented pursuits. By maintaining that in all these pursuits, the intended object is the real good whose possession would bring us true happiness, she can explain why *erōs* has such a force on us, and how it can motivate us to try to get things right in this most important question.

1.3 A Possible Objection to my Reading

In Section 1.1, I argued that Diotima generalizes Aristophanes's account to a theory encompassing all classes of desire that would also fall under her generic *erōs*. This

22 See Barney 2010.

23 Santas 1964.

24 The claim that we always desire the good is usually identified with the alleged 'intellectualism' of the Socratic dialogues (*Protagoras* 358b–d, *Meno* 77a–78c, *Gorgias* 466a–468e): see Irwin 1995, 303. Price 1989, 254–255 maintains that this is a conscious deviation from the 'middle dialogue' psychology Plato had come to hold by the time he wrote *Symposium*, while Rowe 2006 locates the *Symposium* after the advent of forms but before the psychological advance to tripartition. It is beyond the scope of this paper to ascertain whether the *Symposium* constitutes an anomaly in the way suggested by Price and Rowe, but see Sheffield 2006b, *Appendix*. Carone 2001 *passim* and Barney 2010, 45 discuss the interesting idea that even after tripartition, the lower drives pursue their object as good. Cf. *Republic* 505e1–2 and *Philebus* 20d.

'*oikeion* theory' is then contrasted with her own '*agathon* theory' which I discussed in Section 1.2. But is Diotima really reconstructing and discussing the general theory underlying Aristophanes's account? After all, Diotima has just presented her novel account of *erōs* as a universal drive for the good and for happiness. Might she not simply be pointing out that Aristophanes misses this wider scope? In this case, Diotima never seriously intends to discuss a general '*oikeion* theory'. Instead, she dismisses Aristophanes's *oikeion*-based account for its failure to generalize.[25]

Diotima's example of diseased limbs certainly moves the discussion of the *oikeion* beyond Aristophanes's originally envisioned context of interpersonal love. It also offers a successful counterexample to a general *oikeion*-based account of *erōs*: if we desire the possession of whatever seems *oikeion* to us, then this must apply to the limbs of the body, a seemingly uncontroversial case of something 'belonging' to us.[26] Yet there are cases (when their continued possession would be detrimental for us) in which we would prefer even to get rid of our arms and feet. Hence, we do not desire the possession of whatever seems *oikeion* to us (205e3–5).

But is the problem here really a failure of Aristophanes's account to generalize from specific to generic *erōs*? I submit that Diotima's point is a different one: she generalizes his account to the underlying theory to illustrate that something is not quite right with the theory *in general*, *including* the case of specific *erōs*. This can be seen from the fact that, in the very next sentence (205e5–6), Diotima claims that *neither* group (that is, neither the people who would prefer to have their limbs amputated, *nor Aristophanes's lovers*[27]) embrace what belongs, unless the good is what belongs. When applied to the case of specific *erōs*, her point stands: even if we lived in a universe where each of us 'belonged' to one particular other person, we still would not desire to be together with this person if we were of the impression that such a union was *bad* for us. 'Belonging together' would neither result in mutual desire nor, after reunification with our 'other half', in happiness. Diotima's remark about 'either group' (205e5–6) thus suggests that the *oikeion* theory is bad *even* at explaining the original context of specific *erōs*. The problem is not failed generalization, but general failure.

1.4 The Dismissal Reading of Diotima's Response

As we have seen, Diotima rules out the *oikeion* as cause and explanation of *erōs*, reaffirming instead her commitment to an *agathon* theory of *erōs*. Nevertheless, her

25 I thank an anonymous reviewer at *Apeiron* for pointing out this possible interpretation.

26 Thus my translation '*even* their arms and legs' for αὐτῶν καὶ πόδας καὶ χεῖρας (205e3), following both Nehamas and Woodruff 1989, and Rowe 1998. The fact that our limbs are especially *oikeia* to us is reflected in Greek usage when one speaks, for instance, of one's οἰκεία χείρ, Soph. *Ant*. 1176.

27 See Rowe 1998 *ad loc*.

ultimate verdict on the overall relevance of the *oikeion* for the analysis of *erōs* remains unclear. In particular, she makes two claims about the relation between the *agathon* and the *oikeion* that require further interpretation. These are the claims that

> (C1) 'we desire neither half nor whole unless it turns out to be good' (205e2–3); and
>
> (C2) we do not embrace what is *oikeion* 'unless one calls the good "*oikeion*" … and the bad "*allotrion*"' (205e6–7).

In this final section of Part 1, I present what at first may seem the most plausible interpretation of the passage, a 'dismissal reading' of Diotima's response. Such an interpretation maintains that our passage raises the subject of the *oikeion*, briefly discusses it, and rejects it as completely irrelevant. Aristophanes's speech and his concept of the *oikeion* turn out to be nothing but a negative contribution, a 'target for Diotima's fire.'[28] The principal reason for adopting a dismissal reading is Diotima's diseased-limb counterexample. As we have seen, this example shows that what we consider *oikeion* and what we desire is not coextensive. Even for objects anybody would accept as 'belonging' to us, body-parts such as arms and legs, we do not desire their possession in all circumstances. The *oikeion* theory's claim that something is desirable if, and only if, we consider it *oikeion*, is straightforwardly refuted by pointing to the existence of something that is considered *oikeion* but is undesirable. At the same time, the passage suggests another class of things that *is* coextensive with that of desirable things, and is appropriately connected to desire as its cause and explanation: things we consider *agatha*. The reason why the limbs are no longer desirable is precisely because their possession does not appear good anymore.

How does the dismissal reading interpret Diotima's claims C1 and C2? C1 seems to play right into the hands of the dismissal reading and its observation that the things we consider *oikeia* and the things we consider *agatha* – and thus desirable – are non-coextensive. C2, by contrast, does not draw on or imply non-coextensivity. Rather, it proposes a revised extension of the *oikeion* and the *allotrion*, aligning them with what we consider *agathon* and *kakon*, respectively. The significance of this claim depends on whether this revised extension is intended to reflect a deeper connection between *agathon* and *oikeion*. The dismissal reading precisely denies this. Accordingly, its best strategy is to read Diotima as contemplating an unsubstantial change in linguistic convention. The exponent of the dismissal reading could thus interpret C2 as a mere turn of phrase, to the following effect: 'People only desire what they consider *agathon*; if somebody claims that we pursue the *oikeion*, this is fine by me, as long as what they mean by "*oikeion*" is the *agathon* – that is, if they call what they consider *agathon* "*oikeion*" and what they consider *kakon* "*allotrion*". The concept of

28 Dover 1966, 50.

the *oikeion* adds nothing interesting to the analysis of *erōs* and should be dismissed as irrelevant.'

2 The *Symposium* as an Ethical Anomaly? Diotima's Criticism of the *Oikeion* Reconsidered

On the dismissal reading discussed in Part 1, Diotima rejects Aristophanes's *oikeion* not only as cause and explanation of *erōs*. Rather, she dismisses the concept wholesale, denying any substantial relationship to the *agathon*. As we shall see now, such an interpretation would face a troubling consequence: it would render the *Symposium* an ethical anomaly in the Platonic *corpus*. In this Second Part, I first demonstrate that Plato in many places characterizes the good we desire as *oikeion* to us (Section 2.1). I then show that we do not have to accept the anomaly, as a different, 'revision reading' is possible. According to this reading, Diotima suggests a revisionary account of the *oikeion* in light of her *agathon* theory: our *agathon* is our true *oikeion* (Section 2.2). While there is no explicit evidence confirming or contradicting either reading, I explain why the revision reading is nevertheless more plausible (Section 2.3). I conclude by suggesting that, if there is something that may be counted as positive evidence for the revision reading, it is Diotima's theory of psychic pregnancy. I demonstrate that interpreting psychic pregnancy in the light of our discussion helps us appreciate the particular way in which this theory presents the *agathon* produced by the philosopher as something that is intimately connected with his nature and self (Section 2.4).

2.1 *Oikeion* and *Agathon*: Evidence from Other Dialogues

A survey of Plato's dialogues makes it clear that the relationship between the *agathon* and the *oikeion* is a recurring and central theme, with Plato suggesting in a number of places that what is good or best for an entity, often identified with its condition of virtue (*aretē*), is also supremely *oikeion* to it. To start with, both the *Charmides* (163c4–e11) and the *Lysis* (221d1–222e7) play with the idea that the *agathon* and the *oikeion* are coextensive. Indeed, the *Lysis* considers a theory of desire quite similar to that of Aristophanes: anything that desires must lack its object; to be lacking, the object must have been taken away; to have been taken away, it must have naturally belonged (been *phusei oikeion*) – hence all desire (*erōs*, *philia*, and *epithumia*) is for an *oikeion* (221e2–4). As we shall see in the next section, this much may be compatible with Diotima on a certain reading. Where the *Lysis* parts ways with the *Symposium* is

when Socrates proceeds to consider 'belonging' as the cause (*aitia*, 221d1) of the *agathon*'s desirability. This is a point Diotima unequivocally denies.

While the *Charmides* and the *Lysis* leave it open whether the proposed connection between *agathon* and *oikeion* is seriously endorsed, other dialogues clearly rely on a substantial connection between the two. The ordering activity of *nous*, which alone understands and cares for the best of each thing, is in several places portrayed as bestowing to each part of the soul what is *oikeion* to it. The *Timaeus* identifies the aim of the ethical life in reason allotting to each part its proper nourishment and motion (*oikeia trophē kai kinēsis*, 90c7). *Republic* IX similarly states that only the guidance of reason ensures that each part receives its proper pleasure (*oikeia hēdonē*, 586e1).[29] This is because 'what is best (*beltiston*) for each thing also most properly belongs (is *oikeiotaton*) to it' (586e1–2).[30]

What *is* best for each thing is to be in its state of ontological excellence, its virtue (*aretē*). In the *Gorgias*, *aretē* is characterized as an *oikeios kosmos* (506e2–3), the state of order proper to an entity *qua* thing of its kind. The claim that it is of the utmost importance to put our soul into its state of proper order is taken up in the *Phaedo* (114d8–115a3): the pleasures of the body constitute an *allotrios kosmos* – instead, we should accord to the soul its own order (*hautēs kosmos*) consisting of the virtues, something which is achieved as we pursue the pleasures of learning. Just as in the *Gorgias*, virtue is here characterized as the soul's *oikeios kosmos*.[31] However, the clearest expression that an entity's *aretē* is *oikeia* to it is found in *Republic* I's function argument (352d2–354a11). This argument relies on the notion of an entity's function (*ergon*), the manifestation of its essential nature in activity. The disposition by which an entity fulfils its *ergon* well is its 'proper virtue' (*oikeia aretē*, 353c1 *et passim*). *Aretē* enables the entity to manifest its nature to the fullest extent,[32] attaining what most properly belongs (is *oikeion*) to it: the realization of its own essential being.[33] In the

29 Towards the end of the *Philebus*, Socrates states that true and pure pleasures alone are *oikeia* to humans (*Phil.* 63e4) and should be admitted to the mixed life. However, the intellectual virtue of *nous* is by far more *oikeion* and related to us than pleasure (67a11–12).

30 Adam 1902 *ad loc.* is very percipient when he characterizes this as 'a saying which reaches to the very foundations of Plato's philosophy: for if that which is best for each thing, is also most its own – most truly akin to it, part of its very being, – it follows that each thing truly is just in proportion as it is good. In other words the cause of all existence is the Good'.

31 Explicit reference to the *oikeios kosmos* is missing here, but the reference to its opposite state as an *allotrios kosmos*, together with the expression '*hautēs kosmos*' makes it clear that the same concept is at play.

32 See Kosman 1976, 39: '[V]irtue is, as we know, ontologically like goodness and beauty; it is the mode of an entity's *being itself well*. So cosmically love is that principle that draws the world toward itself, not just, as Erixymachus claimed, toward something else, but toward its own good and beautiful being.'

33 See Krämer 1959, 51, cited at the outset.

case of the soul, such full actual self-realization is identified with its state of flourishing (*eudaimonia*).

The evidence from the other dialogues thus suggests a fairly consistent position according to which an entity's *agathon* is most properly *oikeion* to it. In its condition of virtue, an entity fully possesses what properly belongs to it, and is free from all *allotria* that separate it from its true essential nature.[34] A dismissal reading of our passage would render the *Symposium* an anomaly in severing this connection between our *agathon* and *oikeion*. However, as we shall see next, this is not the only way of interpreting our passage.

2.2 The Revision Reading of Diotima's Response

Like the dismissal reading, a revision reading of our passage accepts that Diotima proclaims *goodness* as the cause and explanation of desire. Unlike the dismissal reading, it maintains that she does not as a consequence discard the *oikeion* as irrelevant. Rather, it interprets our passage as acknowledging the concept's importance and contribution to the discussion, while suggesting a corrected account in light of the *agathon* theory.[35] How can this interpretation make sense of Diotima's claims about the relationship between the *oikeion* and the *agathon* – that 'we desire neither half nor whole unless it turns out to be good' (C1) and that we do not embrace the *oikeion* 'unless one calls the good "*oikeion*" … and the bad "*allotrion*"' (C2)?

The revision reading takes C2 not as contemplating an unsubstantial linguistic change, but as suggesting a revisionary account of the *oikeion* based on a conceptual link to the *agathon*. An entity's goodness is the only thing that truly belongs to it. Indeed, goodness is the cause and explanation of true 'belonging'.[36] Neither Diotima's prospective amputees nor Aristophanes's lovers desire the *oikeion qua oikeion*. Like every human being, they are driven by a desire for the good, and it is the consideration of an object as good that causes and explains their desire. However, because only the good truly belongs to us, they *eo ipso* also pursue the (revised) *oikeion*. Interestingly, Diotima reserves the verb cognate with *erōs* (ἐρῶσιν, 206a1) for our desire for the good, whereas the pursuit of the revised *oikeion* is described using a different verb (ἀσπάζονται, 205e6).[37] This chimes well with an interpretation

34 This is especially clear in the comparison of the soul to Glaucus in *Republic* X, which I discuss in Section 3.1 below.

35 Cf. O'Brien 2007, 76, who characterizes Diotima's response as 'both an acknowledgement and a correction' of the *oikeion* theory, which he however associates mainly with Empedocles and his ideas.

36 I have explored a possible rationale for this position in Section 2.1 above.

37 I thank Ursula Coope for pointing this out to me.

according to which, *in a way*, we desire the *oikeion*, but only in a derivative manner, by virtue of its connection to goodness.

How does the revision reading interpret C1, the claim from which the dismissal reading draws its justification? The revision reading does not deny that what we consider *oikeion* often fails to be or appear good. As the diseased-limb objection shows, even commonly accepted cases of *oikeia* things may turn out bad and undesirable. However, taking its cue from C2 and its radically revisionary conception of the *oikeion*, this reading concludes that such cases simply reveal the object as not truly *oikeion*. The person with the incurably diseased limb or the lover trapped in a toxic relationship should seek separation from the bad appendage that was considered *oikeion* but is now revealed as *allotrion*. The limb or partner should no longer be considered *oikeion* precisely because they lack an appropriate connection to our good.

2.3 The Case for the Revision Reading

How should we decide between the dismissal and revision readings of Diotima's response? Such a task would be easy if there was explicit evidence for one or the other – if, for instance, Diotima concluded her speech either by negating the relevance of the *oikeion* ('Clearly, my friend, it is the *agathon*, not the *oikeion*, towards whose attainment *erōs* is our guide and helper') or by affirming its relevance when correctly conceived ('It is in this way, my dear Socrates, that *erōs*, in leading us to the *agathon*, unites us with our true *oikeion*: wisdom and the rest of virtue, not a human being, make us complete and whole').

Instead, both *oikeion* and *agathon* disappear from view after our passage. It is important to note that this silence concerns both concepts:[38] if Diotima stopped mentioning only the *oikeion* while retaining the *agathon*, this would be evidence that she dismisses the former in favour of the latter. The disappearance of *both* concepts points to a different interpretation: the time of abstract theorizing in the discussion of the nature (201e8–204c6) and object (204c7–206a13) of *erōs* is over. As the speech turns to the workings of *erōs* (206b1–212a7), Diotima considers erotic desire in its concrete manifestation. In order to determine which of the two readings is preferable, we must therefore study Diotima's candidate for our true *agathon* in the ascent

38 There is one exception for the case of the *agathon* very early on in 206e8–207a2. This is a back-reference to 206a12–13 (cf. Rowe 1998 *ad loc.*), which however does not seem intended to make any points about the *agathon*, but rather to establish immortality as a central theme of the ensuing discussion.

passage (209e5–212a7), wisdom and virtue, and examine how it may be related to our *oikeion*. As we shall see, it is instructive to compare her account with the ones found in the other middle dialogues *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Phaedrus*.

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The ascent describes a process in which the philosophical acolyte's intellect is developed by passing through, and gaining understanding of, an ordered series of increasingly abstract varieties of beauty – all the way up to Beauty itself.[39] Only here, in cognitive contact with the form, is the intellectual virtue of *phronēsis* fully developed. In this state, the philosopher's intellectual power finds its proper object, the *telos* 'for the sake of which' all previous efforts have been undertaken (210e5–6, cf. 211c2). This grasp of the truth coincides with the production of 'true virtue' (*aretē alēthēs*, 212a4). One way of interpreting this is to view wisdom as the soul's only true virtue, at the exclusion of moral virtue.[40] Alternatively, and I think preferably, we may interpret this as stating that the acquisition of wisdom brings with it the true way of exhibiting moral virtue.[41] After all, 'wisdom *and the rest of virtue*' have earlier been introduced as that which is fitting for those pregnant in soul (including the philosopher) to conceive and give birth to (209a1–4). The difference between the philosopher and the honour lover is not that the philosopher realizes only some 'true' part of this capacity, but that he alone truly realizes the whole of it.[42]

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39 For accounts of this process, see Moravcsik 1971, Irwin 1977, 167–9, Patterson 1991, and especially Sheffield 2006, 121–33, with whom I am largely in agreement.

40 This seems to me suggested in Sheffield 2006b, 134–5. See also Ferrari 1992, 260.

41 For such an interpretation of *aretē alēthēs*, see for instance Sier 1997, 183–4. Price 1989, 51, similarly stresses the practical side of *aretē alēthēs*.

42 Vlastos 1973 famously criticizes Plato's characterization of *erōs* and its culmination in the ascent to the form as instrumentalizing other people, and consequently not viewing them as worthy of love for their own sake. This has led to decades of back and forth in the literature, for an overview of which see Sheffield 2006b, 154–82. I cannot possibly do justice to this debate within the remits I have set myself in this paper, and shall only make two points here. Firstly, whether or not it appeals to our sentiments, Diotima is very clear that *erōs* aims at the permanent possession of the good which the agent takes to be constitutive of his *eudaimonia*. Fundamentally, *erōs* is 'auto-erotic' (Kosman 1976, 28). It is an interesting question in how far *erōs* in the *Symposium* can *also* accommodate concern for other people and interpersonal love, but it is not the question I have set myself in this paper. Secondly, the 'true virtue' produced in contact with the truth (212a4) is not the point where we should try to settle the question of concern for others by making Diotima propose that this virtue is produced not in the philosopher, but in another person (see Price 1989, 49–54). There is simply no indication that the 'true virtue' is anything other than a direct consequence of the vision of the truth *in the soul of the philosopher*.

This interpretation of the *Symposium*'s *aretē alēthēs* reveals a parallel with the *Phaedo*.[43] In the *Phaedo*'s correct exchange argument (68c5–69e4), wisdom (*phronēsis*) is characterized as the soul's purification (*katharmos*) from the false beliefs, desires, and fears instilled by pleasure and pain. This brings about the *katharsis* represented by the virtues of character, resulting in a condition called 'true virtue' (*alēthēs aretē*, 69b3).[44] While other people can only hope to develop 'popular and civil' forms of these virtues, which result 'from habit and practice without philosophy and *nous*' (82a12–b3) and are revealed on closer inspection as a mere 'shadow-painting' (*skiagraphia*, 69b7), the philosopher alone acquires the whole of virtue in its true form. Similarly, the 'virtues of all sorts' (*pantoia aretē*, 209e2–3) produced by the *Symposium*'s honour lovers for the sake of 'glorious reputation' (208d7–8) are later revealed as mere 'phantoms of virtue' (*eidōla aretēs*, 212a4).

Republic VI's channel argument (485a10–487a6) similarly reserves for the philosopher a special way of acquiring virtue of character alongside wisdom.[45] The pursuit of the truth leads to a 'drying out' of other desires.[46] Like a chorus that follows its leader, a whole string of virtues follows the philosopher's pursuit of the truth (489e4–490c10). Because of her special grasp of the forms, the philosopher realizes virtue of character as far as this is possible for a human being, while the virtue she fashions in the souls of her fellow citizens is only a 'popular' variety (500b8–d10).[47] The *Phaedrus*, finally, describes the philosophical lovers in their joint philosophizing as 'enslaving that by which vice enters the soul, but liberating that by which virtue enters' (256b2–3). Their virtue is revealed to be true virtue when it is contrasted with the best condition the non-lovers can hope to attain, an inferior type that is merely 'praised by the majority as virtue' (256e6).

With its characterization of our *agathon* as wisdom and true virtue, contrasted with inferior semblances attainable by non-philosophers, the *Symposium* is thus in agreement and in close conversation with the other middle dialogues. What is

43 On the temporal proximity of the two dialogues, see for instance Hackforth 1950, 43. The motif and language is of course not limited to the *Symposium* and *Phaedo*. For ἀληθὴς ἀρετὴ cf. *Republic* 554e5 and *Laws* 731a7, but also the σοφία καὶ ἀρετὴ ἀληθινή of *Theaetetus* 176c5. True virtue is often said to be held μετὰ φρονήσεως, by means of or alongside wisdom (*Phaedo* 69b3, *Republic* 591b5, 621c5, *Theaetetus* 176b2, *Laws* 906b1).

44 A convincing account of this argument has been developed by Weiss 1987. See further Kosman 1976, 41.

45 For discussions of this argument, see Kahn 1996, 276–7 and Scott 2021.

46 See also *Republic* 500b8–d10 and 581b5–8, with Scott 2007, 152.

47 It is a matter of much scholarly debate how the varieties of non-philosophical virtues within and between the dialogues relate to each other. For my purposes, it is sufficient to note that there is a clear distinction between 'true' philosophical virtue which accompanies wisdom, and non-philosophical virtue that does not. For discussions, see Weiss 1987, Irwin 1995 section 163 (234–5), Kamtekar 1998, esp. 334–8, Bobonich 2002 ch. 1, Wilberding 2009, Kraut 2010, Vasiliou 2012, and Reed 2020.

important for our purposes is that these dialogues all explicitly or implicitly characterize the good of wisdom and virtue as an *oikeion*. We have already discussed the *Phaedo*'s echo of the *Gorgias*'s *oikeios kosmos* (114d8–115a3), and the concept of *oikeia aretē* in *Republic* I's function argument (352d2–354a11).[48] The *Phaedrus*, when it likens the acquisition of intellectual and moral virtue to the regrowing of a pair of wings, also implicitly characterizes this process as the attainment of an *oikeion*: the wings originally belong to the soul, which is why its current state is deficient. By regrowing its wings, the soul once again becomes whole and complete.[49]

If, as the dismissal reading maintains, Diotima had really denied any connection between the *agathon* and *oikeion* in our passage, it would be strange to find her proceeding to deliver an account that fits in so remarkably well with the *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Phaedrus*, all of which identify our *agathon* as our true *oikeion*. Given the anomalous character of her alleged position, should we not expect to see this reflected in her discussion of the workings of *erōs*? Instead, the ascent is perfectly compatible with the other middle dialogues. Granted, this does not amount to explicit evidence that the revision reading of our passage is correct. Nevertheless, these considerations should at least incline us to the revision reading, when we accept the following principle of Platonic interpretation: *in the absence of explicit evidence to the opposite, it is most reasonable to avoid creating substantial anomalies among closely related dialogues.* Interpreting Diotima as severing the connection between our *agathon* and *oikeion* would constitute just such a substantial anomaly, as it touches on an issue at the heart of Plato's ethics. As such an anomalous position is not borne out by anything Diotima goes on to say in her speech, we should reject the dismissal reading and adopt a revision reading of her response.

2.4 Psychic Pregnancy: A Portrayal of the Philosopher's 'Offspring' of Wisdom and True Virtue as *Oikeion*?

If we look for more positive evidence for the revision reading and a potential (implicit) role of the *oikeion* in Diotima's account, one particularly promising place is Diotima's theory of psychic pregnancy. In this final section of Part 2, I explore in how far psychic pregnancy can be seen as supplying such evidence.

In my earlier discussion of Diotima's *agathon* theory,[50] I concentrated on the desiderative aspect of *erōs*. In this, I broadly followed the analysis of the nature and object of *erōs* up to and including our passage. However, as we reach the ensuing

48 Section 2.1 above.

49 I discuss what differentiates the *Phaedrus*'s wings from Diotima's limbs in Section 3.1 below.

50 Section 1.2 above.

discussion of the workings of *erōs* (206b1–212a7), this is supplemented with an important element. *Erōs* is not merely a desire rooted in lack, but brings with it the productive capacity to attain its object. This confirms the earlier mythological description of *erōs* as the child of *Penia* and *Poros*, characterized simultaneously by resourcelessness (*aporia*) and resourcefulness (*euporia*, 203a9–204c6).[51] The latter, *euporetic* side of *erōs* is now metaphorically described as a physical or psychic 'pregnancy',[52] which can only be delivered in the presence of a suitable beautiful medium (206b7–8, 206c1–5).[53] The concrete manifestation of this productive activity depends on the perceived good one pursues, and on whether one is more pregnant in body or in soul. Three manifestations are discussed.

In the 'lower mysteries' (208b7–209e4), *erōs* takes the form of *philotimia* (208c3) – the pursuit of honour as good – and manifests its productive capacity in two forms. Honour lovers more pregnant in *body* give birth to children. Honour lovers more pregnant in *soul* deliver, to a limited extent, their psychic capacity for 'wisdom and the rest of virtue' (209a3–4). In both cases, the product of the delivery contributes to the agent's honour and memory. In the 'higher mysteries' (209e5–212a7), *erōs* manifests itself as *philosophia* – the pursuit of wisdom as good. As we have seen,[54] the philosopher's erotic activity issues in the production of wisdom and true virtue. The attainment of the good coincides with the highest form of immortality achievable for a human being (212a6–7).[55]

I have more to say about the relationship between Diotima's theory of psychic pregnancy and the theory of recollection discussed in dialogues such as the *Meno*, *Phaedo*, and *Phaedrus* in Section 3.2 below. For present purposes, I wish to bring out

51 On which see Sheffield 2006b, 46–53.

52 I am calling even the physical pregnancy 'metaphorical' as Socrates almost exclusively talks about male ejaculation into the female, which is (problematically) likened to the delivery of a pregnancy. See Pender 1992, 74. Both in the case of physical and psychic 'pregnancy', the focus of Diotima's teachings is firmly on the male. See Hobbs 2006, 254.

53 The formulation τόκος ἐν καλῷ is ambiguous as to whether the 'birth' occurs within, or in the presence of, the medium (see Nehamas and Woodruff 1989 note 79 *ad loc*.). As it turns out, the latter is the more universal sense, as even in cases where the 'pregnancy' is delivered into the beautiful medium, that medium acts first and foremost as stimulant, providing the 'beautiful environment' (Rowe 1998 *ad* 204d1–209e4) that facilitates the delivery. See further Sheffield 2006b, 87 note 14, as well as Price 1989, 41 note 45.

54 Section 2.3 above.

55 The important addition that we not only want to possess the good but want to do so permanently (206a11–12) occurs almost like an afterthought at the close of the discussion of the object of *erōs* (204c7–206a13). Whether the move is legitimate or not, Diotima later transforms this into the dual goal of attaining the good and attaining immortality (206e8–207a4). On the legitimacy of the move, see Dover *ad* 204c7–206a13, as well as Allen 1991, 61 note 99 and Sier 1997, 107. I discuss the debated issue of the status of this kind of 'immortality' in Section 3.2 below.

one particular feature that sets Diotima's chosen metaphor apart from that of recollection: by rendering the productions of those 'pregnant' in soul as 'children' (*paides*, 209c7, 8) and 'offspring' (*ekgona*, 209d2), Diotima may be seen as implicitly portraying them as *oikeia*, since one's children are *oikeioi* in the most literal sense: they are members of one's household and therefore among one's closest kin.[56] In the philosopher, who alone manages to fully deliver the soul's pregnancy, the product of the delivery immediately coincides with his pursued *agathon*: wisdom and virtue of character.[57] The philosopher's *agathon* is therefore an intimate *oikeion* to him, his own offspring and kin.

There is, however, a possible objection to this argument: the imagery of pregnancy and delivery employed by Diotima does not by itself lend itself to establishing this kind of special kinship between deliverer and offspring, as the female according to a widely held Greek conception shared by Plato (cf. *Timaeus* 73b–c, 86c, 91c–d) serves as a mere passive container of the male seed, contributing nothing of its own nature.[58] The child would on this view only be akin to the father, who contributed all of its nature through his semen, and not to the mother, who underwent the pregnancy.[59] However, there is a response to this: Plato in fact uses the language of pregnancy to talk about *both* the male and the female part in reproduction, and at least a substantial part of what Diotima says is not concerned with female pregnancy, but relies on the image of a male 'pregnancy', in which the male is 'pregnant' with its semen and releases and implants this in the female during intercourse (the 'birth', cf. 206c5–6).[60] Transferred to the phenomenon of psychic 'pregnancy', the aforementioned objection thus actually works in my favour, as the entire nature of the male is transferred to the offspring. This is precisely how Diotima conceives of the phenomenon of vicarious immortality: the way in which the mortal is preserved is by leaving behind 'something like itself' (*hoion auto*, 208b2). The offspring is something for which the parent has an especial affinity, as 'everything by nature values what springs from itself' (*to hautou apoblastēma phusei pan timāi*, 208b4–5). The language of psychic pregnancy, understood in the sense of the 'male pregnancy' after which it is modelled, thus seems precisely like the right place, if anywhere, to look for a

56 See note 9 above.

57 By contrast, both types of honour lovers exhibit a gap between their product and desired (perceived) good. Children as well as displays of wisdom and virtue are produced *for the sake of* honour and memory, which in turn have to be accorded by other people (see Sheffield 2006b, 91–2).

58 See Morrison 1964, 51–5 on Plato's views and its possible sources.

59 I thank an anonymous reviewer at *Apeiron* for alerting me to this possible objection.

60 See Pender 1992 on the two types of 'pregnancy' in the *Symposium*, male and female. For further discussion of the way in which male and female 'pregnancy' are woven together in Diotima's account, see Hobbs 2006, Nightingale 2017, and Nally 2023.

positive characterization of the *agathon* of wisdom and virtue produced by the philosopher at the height of the ascent as an *oikeion*.

We can see that interpreting psychic pregnancy in light of our discussion reveals an interesting contrast to the language of recollection. Given its status as a pregnancy of his soul, the philosopher's delivery of wisdom and virtue is something that is intimately tied to his nature and self.[61] By identifying the philosopher's offspring as *aretē*, Diotima of course adds a twist to the metaphor: the *apoblastēma* (208b5) the philosopher produces in his erotic activity is not a separate being but himself, realized as good. These observations are not supposed to suggest that recollection is not *characterized* as a capacity to produce something that is *oikeion* to us. Indeed, the *Phaedo* at one point literally calls recollection a recovery of an *oikeia epistēmē* (75e5–6), and we have already seen that both *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus* in one way or another portray the condition restored in the process of recollection as *oikeion* to us.[62] My point is that the language of recollection does not *by itself* convey that what we once possessed and have the capacity to restore is an intrinsic *oikeion* to our nature. Interpreting psychic pregnancy in the way proposed here reveals that it contains precisely this dimension of the special *oikeion* character of the *agathon* produced in the ascent.

3 The *Symposium* as a Psychological Anomaly? Diotima's Speech and the *Archaia Phusis* of the Soul

As we have seen in Part 2, a revision reading is not only the most plausible interpretation of Diotima's response: it can also enrich our understanding of her speech as a whole and its relationship to the other dialogues. It should be equally clear that the proposed interpretation has implications for our evaluation of Aristophanes. Rather than constituting a mere negative contribution and 'target for Diotima's fire,'[63] his role is more positive: when the poet praises *erōs* as 'leading us to the *oikeion*' (193d2), he adds an important insight to the *Symposium*'s evolving understanding of *erōs*, and unwittingly ties into a recurring Platonic theme.

61 See also Sier 1997, 110: 'Das κυεῖν an Leib und Seele bezeichnet die kreative und reproduktive Ausrichtung der menschlichen Physis, und es läßt den Eros als Streben nach Verwirklichung eines im Menschen angelegten ›Eigenen‹ (οἰκεῖον) erscheinen.'

62 Sections 2.1 and 2.3 above.

63 Dover 1966, 50.

In this Final Part, I show that this is not limited to his contribution of the *oikeion*, but extends to the suggestion that in leading us to the *oikeion*, *erōs* 'restores us in our original nature (*archaia phusis*)' (193d4). As we shall see, the question of an anomalous character of the *Symposium* makes a return as we consider whether Diotima's account is compatible with the view prominent in other dialogues, that our self-perfection constitutes the return to an original nature.

I begin with a survey of dialogues other than the *Symposium*, and show that Plato not only frequently portrays the soul's perfection as the restoration of a temporally prior condition of excellence; in two places, he explicitly connects this with the concept of the original nature (*archaia phusis*) prominent in Aristophanes's speech (Section 3.1). I then turn to the question whether Diotima's speech constitutes a psychological anomaly in the Platonic *corpus* by not presenting the ascent as the return to an original nature. As we shall see, an answer to this question depends on which interpretation one adopts of the *Symposium*'s stance on immortality (Section 3.2).

3.1 *Archaia Phusis*: Evidence from Other Dialogues

Despite Diotima's diseased-limb objection, there are two dialogues in which Plato uses precisely the simile of a mutilated physical organism to depict the soul's deficiency with respect to a temporally prior condition of excellence. In the *Phaedrus*, the soul has lost the wings that have originally allowed it to travel with the gods (243e9–257b6).[64] In *Republic* X, the soul is likened to the sea-creature Glaucus, whose original limbs have been maimed and who has amassed a host of alien accretions (611b1–612a7). While the *Phaedo* does not employ such an image, it too presupposes an original state in which the soul was in full possession of its *oikeia epistēmē* and free from alien impurities (75e5–6). Similarly, the ethical culmination of the *Timaeus* describes the correct therapy of the rational soul as a restoration of its motions to the undisturbed condition it enjoyed before birth (90c6–d7). What is most remarkable, however, is that Plato in two instances – *Republic* X's Glaucus passage and the culmination of the *Timaeus* – refers to the soul's state of integrity and wholeness as its '*archaia phusis*' (*Republic* 611c7–d1, *Timaeus*). This is the very term we found used by Aristophanes (191d1–2, 192e9, 193c5, 193d4), which only occurs in his speech and in these two central passages.[65]

64 I discuss this in Section 2.3 above.

65 We have already seen in Section 2.1 that the Timaeus passage further connects the notion of the archaia phusis with that of the oikeion, when it argues that the rational soul's original state is restored when it receives its proper nourishment and motion – oikeia trophē kai kinēsis.

The origins of the expression '*archaia phusis*' are probably to be sought in Hippocratic medical literature, where it denotes the healthy state of a body.[66] Thus Erotianus in his *Collection of Hippocratic Words* defines '*archaia phusis*' as the state 'before the illness and in accordance with nature'.[67] Given that Aristophanes sets out to praise *erōs* as the 'healer' of human nature (189c9; 191d3; 193d5), we should not be surprised to find him employing such medical terminology. Erotianus's definition reveals two aspects of the *archaia phusis*: on the one hand, it carries the sense of *temporal priority*, as the state that has obtained before the current state of illness. On the other hand, the *archaia phusis* is 'original' in the sense of being a *normative standard*: it is the correct, normal, or healthy condition whose restoration is the aim of the medical practitioner – the condition that is 'in accordance with nature', *kata phusin*.[68] It is this latter, normative sense of the *archaia phusis* that properly qualifies its restoration as a 'healing', as this process facilitates a return to a condition of proper functioning and health.

When Plato puts the Hippocratic concept of the *archaia phusis* to work in his positive philosophical reflections on the soul and its quest for self-perfection, he does not make the same mistake as his character Aristophanes: he does not use historically prior possession to ground either the 'belongingness' or the desirability of wisdom and virtue.[69] It is its second aspect of being a normative standard, its – as Diotima would have it – *goodness*, that causes and explains both features. The fundamental goodness of our true *oikeion* incidentally also explains why Diotima's diseased-limb objection does not apply to in this case: virtue can *never turn out bad*, and can for this reason never be revealed to be an undesirable *allotrion*. This is what differentiates *Republic* X's mutilated limbs and the *Phaedrus* palinode's wings from the limbs in Diotima's counterexample.

If so much explanatory work is done by the *archaia phusis*'s aspect of being a normative standard, is there any role left for its other aspect of temporal priority? One answer immediately suggesting itself is of course the theory of recollection.

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66 See Carvalho 2009, 30–1 with note 8, as well as his *Anhang* I, which extensively explores the terminological use of ἀρχαία φύσις in Hippocratic medical literature.

For Plato's engagement with, and positive attitute towards, Hippocratic medicine, see Erixymachus's speech (185e6–188e4) immediately preceding Aristophanes's speech and setting up his account of *Erōs* as healer of human nature, as well as *Phaedrus* 270c–e and *Protagoras* 311b–c.

67 'ἀρχαία φύσις· ἡ πρὸ τοῦ νοσεῖν καὶ κατὰ φύσιν οὖσα'. Cited after Nachmanson, 1918, 41. Found in Carvalho 2009, chapter 3 note 8. See further the entry in Hesychius of Alexandria's *Lexicon* s.v. ἀρχαία φύσις as found in Latte 1953, A 7572. Listed in Carvalho 2009, chapter 3 note 8.

68 Manuwald 2012, note 10, and Carvalho 2009, 29–36. Cf. Aristotle *Rhet*. 1387a16: τὸ ἀρχαῖον ἐγγύς τι φαίνεται τοῦ φύσει.

69 Obdrzalek 2017 expresses the rather contingent basis for 'belonging' to each other in Aristophanes's speech rather fittingly: 'the quality which occasions love is simply the physical-historical quality of being one's other half' (86).

Because our soul's perfect condition is characterized by wisdom, its past possession can be used to explain our capacity for restoration. In recollection, we reactivate a knowledge that we once actively held and which we therefore have a special aptitude to recover. Aristophanes's choice of our *archaia phusis*, a past union in a physical compound with another human being, cannot give us a similar confidence that a future reunion with our *oikeion* is likely to happen.

The shortcomings of Aristophanes's account notwithstanding, it is clear that the poet with his concept of the *archaia phusis* contributes yet another central term which Plato adopts and adapts to conceptualize the soul's original state of wholeness and completeness. Indeed, we have seen that the idea of a temporally prior state of perfection that serves as the soul's normative standard, and whose restoration is the *telos* of our erotic striving, is the norm rather than the exception in Plato's thought. All of this leaves us with a puzzle concerning Diotima's teachings. Unlike the *oikeion*, Diotima does not mention let alone discuss the concept of the *archaia phusis*. Nor does she portray the ascent as a return to a temporally prior condition of excellence. What do we make of the fact that, in the very dialogue in which Aristophanes introduces the centrally important concept of the *archaia phusis*, we find the exceptional case of an account that precisely *lacks* this element? An answer to this question depends on what we take to be Diotima's stance on immortality.

3.2 A Way Out of the Anomaly for the Dogmatic (but not the Sceptic): The Ascent as an Ordering of the Soul *in Accordance with* the *Archaia Phusis*

There are two broad ways of interpreting Diotima's position on the immortality of the soul. A 'sceptical' reading maintains that Plato in the *Symposium* expresses a serious, albeit temporary, rejection of immortality.[70] Taking its cue from Diotima's remark that the mortal (*thnēton*) – 'both body and everything else' (*kai sōma kai t'alla panta*, 208b3–4) – can only hope for a vicarious type of immortality, while the immortal (*athanaton*) participates in immortality 'in a different way' (*allēi*, b4), this reading takes the soul in all its aspects to fall under the former class. On this interpretation, the best prospect the *Symposium* can offer us is vicarious immortality through physical or psychic offspring. Diotima's concluding remark that it belongs to

70 Thus Hackforth 1950, according to whom '[t]he *Symposium* shows us a relapse into temporary scepticism' (45). For a more recent version of a sceptical reading, see Boter 2017, with an extensive bibliography.

the philosopher, 'if to any human being, to be immortal' (212a6–7),[71] does not render the philosopher an exception to this:[72] the only difference is that he is *better* than anybody else at living on through his 'offspring', due to the particular quality of his productions caused by his grasp of the truth.[73] The implication of a sceptical reading for the *Symposium*'s compatibility with the concept of an *archaia phusis* should be clear: having already accepted that Diotima's speech constitutes an anomaly in denying the soul's immortality, the sceptical reading must accept the further anomaly regarding the soul's *archaia phusis* as a direct corollary.

Contrary to the sceptical reading, a 'dogmatic' reading claims that Diotima's focus on our embodied human fate does not exclude the soul's disembodied pre- and post-existence.[74] It takes the distinction between two types of immortality (208b3–4) as an indication that the soul or an aspect of it belongs to the *latter* class, which participates in immortality 'in a different way' (b4). The fact that the *Symposium* discusses the vicarious immortality open to us *qua* mortal human beings does not render it incompatible with the possibility that we share in proper immortality *qua* immortal souls.[75] In support of this claim, the dogmatic reading can point to the fact that the two types of immortality coexist in other dialogues without contradiction.[76] While Diotima refrains from putting more theoretical commitments than necessary on the symposiasts' plates, this interpretation stresses that her account is compatible with, and fruitfully complemented by, teachings found elsewhere.

One instance where the *Symposium* may be seen as profiting from complementation with broader Platonic commitments, including the immortality of the soul and the central importance of the *archaia phusis*, is Diotima's theory of psychic pregnancy. It is certainly possible to consider this theory as a self-standing account of knowledge-acquisition, in which Plato explores an *alternative* to recollection.[77]

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71 εἴπερ τῳ ἄλλῳ ἀνθρώπῳ ἀθανάτῳ καὶ ἐκείνῳ [ὑπάρχει γενέσθαι].

72 *Pace* Sedley 2009, who reads the culmination of the ascent as a form of 'earned immortality', an *apotheosis* reserved exclusively for the philosopher (cf. also O'Brien 1984).

73 For exponents of this view, see Price 1989, 49–54 and Rowe 1998 *ad* 212a6–7. This kind of vicarious immortality, which is contingent on external factors, seems to me utterly out of keeping with the divine character of the philosopher's *eudaimonia* (see Sier 1997, 186: 'es wäre in der Sache ein enttäuschendes Finale'. Allen 1991, 78: 'if Eros were exhausted in [vicarious immortality], desire would be empty and vain, and happiness unobtainable').

74 Diotima's emphasis on humanity and its nature, even in the ascent is incessant: 211d1–3, 211e4–212a2, 212a5–7, 212b3–4.

75 Thus Luce 1952, *contra* Hackforth. For a general argument to read the *Symposium* in a 'dogmatic' way, see Gerson 2006.

76 *Phaedrus* 277a2 and 245c5, *Laws* 721c and 953b3, see Sier 1997, 191.

77 The 'substitution' of recollection with psychic pregnancy is another one of the 'anomalies' mentioned in the introduction to this paper. For a discussion that embraces the anomalous character of the *Symposium*, see Sheffield 2015, 25–33.

However, the dogmatic reader may argue that the theory is not so much an incompatible substitute as it is a smaller subset of the theoretical commitments of the theory of recollection.[78] While the *Symposium* merely posits an innate disposition for knowledge acquisition, recollection may thus be seen as supplementing this with an explanation why such a disposition is present in the first place: it is because the soul is immortal, and has been in its fully realized state of wisdom (its *archaia phusis*) before, that it can advance toward wisdom once again by recollecting its prior knowledge. Incidentally, we may here find another interesting implication of the metaphor of 'pregnancy':[79] a pregnancy is precisely the kind of potentiality that depends on a concrete actuality as its cause. Just like an unexplained physical pregnancy, our condition of 'psychic pregnancy' may be seen as pointing beyond itself, prompting us to reflect what may have brought about our situation in the first place.

Still, Diotima's self-conscious limitation to human nature may cast doubt on whether her account has any use for the concept of an *archaia phusis* as the endpoint of the ascent. At no place in the dialogues does Plato seem to think that a return to the soul's original condition can be brought about during embodiment. This restoration remains an ideal that we can only hope to see realized after disembodiment. So even if immortality and an original nature of the soul remain theoretical commitments in the background, the ascent does not constitute a return to our *archaia phusis*.[80] Here, however, the dogmatic reading may invoke a useful distinction that emerges when we compare the two *verbatim* occurrences of '*archaia phusis*' in *Republic* X and the *Timaeus*. In the *Republic*'s Glaucus passage (611b1–612a7), the concept is indeed employed in a discussion of what the soul would become in its disembodied and fully purified condition. In the ethical culmination of the *Timaeus* (90a2–d7), however, the focus is not on restoration of the soul to its *archaia phusis* after this life, but an ordering of the soul *in accordance with* its *archaia phusis* (*kata tēn archaian phusin*, 90d5) *during* this life.[81] By reading the ascent as a restoration of the soul 'in accordance with its original nature' in the sense developed in the *Timaeus*, the dogmatic reading can thus maintain a role for the concept of the *archaia phusis* in Diotima's account. The formulation *kata tēn archaian phusin* would on this interpretation be compatible with the idea that a full restoration of our original

78 For an argument that the ascent is indeed profitably read when assuming that the theory of recollection forms the 'metaphysical horizon' in the background of this account, see Ionescu 2007.

79 Besides that discussed in Section 2.4 above.

80 Incidentally, Aristophanes with his crude version of the *archaia phusis* theory shares such an element of eschatological reserve: the lovers do not literally return to a fully integrated globule but remain separate individuals, with the hope that one day *erōs* will fully restore them in their original nature. I thank Dominic Scott for pointing this out to me.

81 The Greek text of the *Timaeus* follows Burnet 1902.

nature is not achievable in the here and now. What it expresses instead is the fact that the *archaia phusis* remains the normative standard even as we strive for self-perfection in this life.

I have no intention to settle the dispute between sceptical and dogmatic readings here. Nor shall I, as a consequence, argue in favour of a definitive role for an *archaia phusis* of the soul, as it is conceived in other dialogues, in the ascent passage. My aim in this final section of the paper has instead been more humble: to contrast the two possible readings, and show how each would affect the question under discussion, *viz.* what place if any Diotima's account can have for an *archaia phusis* of the soul. What we have seen is that the sceptical reading has to reject any relevance of the *archaia phusis* for Diotima's account; the dogmatic reading, on the other hand, can maintain their compatibility, interpreting the ascent as an ordering of the soul 'in accordance with its original nature'. In so doing, the dogmatic reading has a way out of the anomaly that may on the surface be seen to result from Diotima's silence on the soul's self-perfection as a straightforward return to its *archaia phusis*. It is up to the reader to decide whether this interpretation is in fact viable.

4 Conclusions

As I have shown in this paper, Aristophanes's speech in the *Symposium* ties into an interesting and hitherto unexplored nexus of ideas in Plato's ethics. When the poet praises *erōs* as 'leading us to the *oikeion*' (193d2) and as 'restoring us in our *archaia phusis*' (193d4), he unwittingly expresses deeply held ethical and psychological convictions which Plato develops in key passages of his dialogues.

It is an interesting question how we should interpret Diotima's engagement with Aristophanes and his contribution of the *oikeion* (205d10–206a1). I have argued that it is most plausible to read her response not as dismissing the *oikeion* wholesale, but as suggesting a revised conception according to which our *agathon* is our true *oikeion*. The ascent's account of our *agathon* is in fundamental agreement and in conversation with the other middle dialogues, all of which characterize our *agathon* as *oikeion* to us. This would be surprising if Diotima had in our passage put forward the highly anomalous claim that there is no connection between the two concepts. Given the compatibility of the ascent with the other middle dialogues, the most reasonable interpretation of our passage is the revision reading, which avoids creating a substantial anomaly without further textual justification. I have also argued that the closest we get to positive evidence for the revision reading and an implicit role of the *oikeion* in Diotima's speech is found in the metaphor of psychic pregnancy, which suggests that the *agathon* of wisdom of virtue produced in the ascent intimately belongs (is *oikeion*) to the philosopher. An interpretation of psychic pregnancy in

light of our discussion moreover helps us appreciate an aspect which the language of recollection by itself does not convey: the *agathon* of wisdom and virtue produced by the philosopher is deeply tied up with his nature and self.

Regarding the compatibility of Diotima's teachings with the doctrine of an *archaia phusis* of the soul, I have shown that the evaluation of this question depends on our stance on immortality in the *Symposium*. A sceptical reading must deny any role for an *archaia phusis* of the soul in Diotima's speech. While the focus of Diotima's speech on embodied human nature means that the ascent cannot mark a full restoration of our original nature, a dogmatic reading may fruitfully interpret the ascent as an ordering of the soul 'in accordance with its *archaia phusis*' (*Tim.* 90d5).

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