

Mauro Tulli / Michael Erler (eds.)

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# PLATO IN SYMPOSIUM

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Edited by

MAURO TULLI AND MICHAEL ERLER

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# The Functions of Apollodorus

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In the opening frame prologue of Plato's *Symposium*, the enigmatic Apollodorus recounts to an unnamed companion, and to us, Aristodemus's story of just what happened at Agathon's drinking party.<sup>1</sup> Since Apollodorus did not attend the party, however, it is unclear what relevance he could have to our understanding of the drama and speeches about *eros* that follow. Apollodorus's strangeness is accentuated by his recession into the background after only two Stephanus pages. It might seem, then, that Plato could have presented the *Symposium* without Apollodorus. So, what difference – if any – does Apollodorus make to the *Symposium*? Does his inclusion call the dramatic and philosophical unity of the work into question?

I argue that, despite initial appearances, Plato has important literary and philosophical reasons for including Apollodorus as a character. Far from being an odd appendage to an otherwise complete narrative, Apollodorus plays an integral role in the *Symposium*. Apollodorus, I contend, plays at least four important, *interconnected* functions in the work, functions that touch on the *Symposium*'s main themes.

## I.

Through his portrayal of Apollodorus, who reveals a passion for philosophical *logoi*, Plato intimates (a) that *eros*, in some way yet to be specified, will somehow be philosophical, or best understood by reference to philosophizing (φιλοσοφεῖν: 173a3); and that (b) the satisfaction of *eros* in philosophy will somehow be important for securing happiness. These claims are central in Socrates' own speech concerning *eros*. Through his portrayal of Apollodorus, then, Plato primes us to consider these claims as we go on to read the various speeches concerning *eros* that follow. This is the *first function* that Apollodorus plays in the *Symposium*.

The thought that *eros* is somehow philosophical is developed throughout the speech of Socrates, which presents the views of Diotima, a Mantinean priestess, and which I take, generally, to present both Socrates' and Plato's own views. (i) According to Socrates' recounting of Diotima's teaching about love (a teaching that personifies *eros* in quasi-mythic terms), *Eros* is in between resource and lack (203b-d), wisdom and ignorance (203e-204a). Lacking wisdom, but neither ignorant nor foolish, *Eros* is a lover of wisdom – a philosopher (203d6, 204a). (ii) Socrates portrays philosophy as the highest form of *eros*, and one whose satisfaction best secures happiness. In his speech, Socrates famously outlines a philosophical ascent, in which the erotic philosopher “moves up” (ἐπανιών: 211b6; cf. ἐπανιέναι: 211c2) from beautiful particular bodies and souls toward Beauty itself (211e). In completing this ascent,

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<sup>1</sup> The *Symposium* translations are generally adapted (with emendations) from A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff's translation, in Cooper (1997).

and in “contemplating and being with” Beauty itself, the philosopher gives birth to true virtue and thereby secures a stable, godlike happiness (212a).

The thought that *eros* is philosophical, and even constitutes a kind of *eros*, is striking. Yet such a view might seem far-fetched. The same goes for the thought that one secures happiness in, or through, philosophical activity. Accordingly, Plato has good reason to introduce his readers to these thoughts through his depiction of Apollodorus in the *Symposium*’s prologue.

First, Plato portrays Apollodorus as erotically inspired, and as passionately concerned with philosophical *logoi*. Apollodorus shows a kind of mania (173e1-2) that reveals him as erotically inspired.<sup>2</sup> Further, this mania is manifest in his passion for making and listening to “speeches about philosophy” (173c3).<sup>3</sup> At the same time, Apollodorus also possesses an acute awareness of the inadequacy of the life that he used to lead (173c).<sup>4</sup> To this extent, Apollodorus reminds one of a Socratic philosopher who has come to attain a certain degree of self-knowledge, *i.e.* a certain awareness of his ignorance. Finally, just as the erotically inspired lover in Socrates’ speech “moves up” a ladder toward the contemplation of Beauty, Apollodorus describes himself as on his “way up (ἀνιῶν) to town” from his home Phalerum (172a2-3), *i.e.* to the city, where Socrates elsewhere plausibly suggests that philosophical conversation might best flourish.<sup>5</sup>

Second, Plato portrays Apollodorus as believing himself to be making progress toward happiness by devoting himself to philosophical *logoi*. Now that he has found philosophy, Apollodorus says, joy has entered his life: “how extraordinarily I enjoy speeches about philosophy, even if I’m only a listener” (173c). Speaking to Glaucon, Apollodorus disdains his life before encountering Socrates (173a):

Before then I ran around aimlessly. Of course, I used to think that what I was doing was important, but in fact I was the most worthless man on earth – as bad as you are this very moment: I used to think philosophy was the last thing a man should do.

Apollodorus, however, suggests that things now are different. Apollodorus now views philosophy as a paramount end worthy of regulating the shape of one’s life. He sees no special happiness in a life organized around wealth and profit (173c-d).

## II.

Yet, ultimately, Apollodorus turns out to be neither a philosopher strictly speaking, nor really on the path to happiness. Apollodorus, then, serves a corresponding *second function* in the *Symposium*. Plato’s characterization of Apollodorus compels Plato’s readers to question what it is to be a philosopher, and to consider how (and why) Apollodorus falls short.<sup>6</sup>

To support this reading, I consider Apollodorus’s innocuous opening line: δοκῶ μοι περὶ ὧν πυνθάνεσθε οὐκ ἀμελέτητος εἶναι (172a1). A literal, if clunky, translation of this line might go something like, “I seem to myself, concerning the things about which you inquire, to be not unrehearsed.” Indeed, only two days ago, Apollodorus says, he recounted to Glaucon the story about Agathon’s party that he had heard from Aristodemus. Thus, Apollodorus reiterates to his anonymous companion in the present, he is “not unrehearsed” (οὐκ ἀμελετήτως ἔχω: 173c1).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Neumann (1965), 285.

<sup>3</sup> At *Symposium* 218b3-4, Alcibiades identifies philosophy as a kind of mania and Bacchic frenzy.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Moore (1969), 229; Sheffield (2006), 10.

<sup>5</sup> See *Phaedr.* 230d. On Apollodorus’s and the philosopher’s respective ascents, see Osborne (1996), 88-90; Corrigan & Glazov-Corrigan (2006), 10.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Rosen (1987), 14; Halperin (1992), 113-114.

Three points about Apollodorus's opening remarks invite comment. (i) With *δοκῶ*, Plato introduces Apollodorus as one who *seems*, and perhaps one against whom we need to be on guard. (ii) The reflexive *μοι* suggests that Apollodorus seems a certain way *to himself*, and it allows that he may well be deluded. (iii) Apollodorus seems to himself to be *οὐκ ἀμελέτητος*, not unrehearsed. One of the primary senses of *melete*, evident here, is "rehearsal" or "practice", *i.e.* focused repetition and drill. But another primary sense of *melete* in Plato is "care". Thus, as Socrates suggests elsewhere, to be a philosopher is to have *melete* for the right sorts of objects. For instance, in the *Apology* (24d-26b), Socrates puns on the name of one of his later accusers, Meletus. Despite his accuser's claims to be concerned about the virtue and education of young Athenians, Socrates claims that "to Meletus, these things neither much nor little ever were cares (*ἐμέλησεν*)" (26b; my translation). The philosopher, by contrast, shows a proper care for the soul and its best condition (29d-30b). Similarly, in the *Alcibiades*, Socrates chastises the young Alcibiades for failing to care for himself and his virtue. Throughout that dialogue, Socrates impresses on young Alcibiades the need to show such care (*epimeleia*: *e.g. Alc. I* 119a9, 120c8-d4, 123d4-e1, 124b2-3, 127d-e, 132b6-c2).

With Apollodorus's multiple references to the ambiguous term *melete* in the opening lines of the *Symposium*, Plato compels his readers to reflect on the meaning(s) of *melete* and on the sort of *melete* that Apollodorus displays. On the one hand, in Apollodorus's opening exchange, Plato highlights the sense of *melete* as rehearsal and drilled practice. On the other hand, since Apollodorus presents himself as passionate for philosophy, Plato invites us to recall the other sense of *melete* that Socrates thinks is proper to the philosopher, *i.e.* care for the soul and its good condition.<sup>7</sup>

With these ambiguities in mind, consider what sort of *melete* Apollodorus displays when Apollodorus expresses his passionate concern to make and listen to "speeches about philosophy" (*περὶ φιλοσοφίας λόγους*: 173c3). Consider, first, the *content* of Apollodorus's concern. As Plato's portrayal of Apollodorus indicates, philosophizing for Apollodorus consists, above all, in making and listening to speeches *about Socrates*. Thus, Apollodorus reveals to Glaucon that he has been consorting with Socrates for three years, and has made it his "care (*ἐπιμελέε*) to know exactly what he says and does each day" (172c). Although Apollodorus presents himself on the "way up" to the city, he, and his erotic drives, are ultimately focused on the Socrates who inhabits the city's streets.<sup>8</sup> Apollodorus seems less – if at all – concerned for the objects at which the philosopher's *eros*, according to Socrates, properly aims. Apollodorus, that is, seems not to be especially concerned with contemplating Beauty itself, or even, more modestly, in pursuing lower kinds of beautiful knowledge. Apollodorus appears similarly fixated on Socrates as such elsewhere in Plato, *e.g.* in the *Apology* and *Phaedo*.<sup>9</sup>

Consider, second, the *manner* in which Apollodorus concerns himself with the content of his care. Apollodorus, in Plato's portrayal, appears content simply *to rehearse and drill* stories about the speeches and deeds of Socrates. On this basis, commentators have compared Apollodorus to a Homeric rhapsode<sup>10</sup> or to someone repeating a mantra.<sup>11</sup> Apollodorus does

<sup>7</sup> As Halperin (1992), 103, notes, Apollodorus's references to *melete* also prefigure Socrates' discussion of *melete qua* rehearsal as preservative, and how *melete* preserves knowledge (*e.g.*, at 207e-208b).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Halperin (1992); Sheffield (2006), 11-12. Rowe (1998), 129, by contrast, argues that Apollodorus is only a "friend" or "companion" (*hetairoi*: 172b7) of Socrates. In reply, notice that *Glaucon* calls Socrates the friend of Apollodorus. That is still consistent with Apollodorus's being a lover of Socrates.

<sup>9</sup> Apollodorus offers to pay Socrates' bail (*Apol.* 38b); he wails at Socrates' death (*Phaed.* 117d-e). Neumann (1965), 285, reasonably argues that grief is a natural response to the loss of a great value in one's life. But Apollodorus's response is excessive by the standard set by Socrates' other companions.

<sup>10</sup> Corrigan & Glazov-Corrigan (2006), 12, 15.

<sup>11</sup> Benardete (2001), 180.

not engage argumentatively or dialectically with Socrates' speeches.<sup>12</sup> To be sure, that Apollodorus memorizes philosophical *logoi* does not by itself show that Apollodorus fails to be a philosopher. For Socrates himself is content in other dialogues to rehearse philosophical *logoi* (e.g. at *Timaeus* 17b-19b, which rehearses points from the *Republic*).<sup>13</sup> Unlike Socrates, however, Apollodorus shows no signs of doing anything other than rehearsing philosophical *logoi*. In light of Plato's other ways of characterizing Apollodorus, this point counts against Apollodorus's philosopher status. Accordingly, when Apollodorus's anonymous companion says, "I don't know exactly how you came to be called 'the soft' (τὸ μαλακὸς καλεῖσθαι)", it is plausible to construe Apollodorus's softness as consisting, in part, of a lack of nerve to question, to challenge, and to press on for the sake of a fuller understanding.<sup>14</sup>

For these reasons, Apollodorus seems not to be a philosopher strictly speaking. Similarly, although Apollodorus believes himself to be making progress toward happiness insofar as he devotes himself to philosophical *logoi*, Plato gives us reasons to doubt Apollodorus's assessment of his own situation. Despite Apollodorus's claims that philosophy has brought him joy (173c4-5), his snarling attitude toward the unenlightened (e.g. at 173a) makes us wonder. If Apollodorus were *truly* progressing toward happiness, we might think, he would be a witty, gentle sort. Yet, as Apollodorus's anonymous companion remarks to Apollodorus, Apollodorus seems unhappy (κακοδαίμονα: 173d1): "for you are always like this in your speeches, always furious with everyone, including yourself, but not with Socrates!" (173d).<sup>15</sup> Apollodorus's response to his anonymous companion – "Of course, my dear friend, it's perfectly obvious why I have these views about us all: it's simply because I'm a maniac, and I'm raving!" (173e) – itself seems tinged with unhappy condescension and obsessiveness. Even if extraordinary enjoyment comes to Apollodorus from recounting the speeches and deeds of Socrates, he seems not to have made much progress. Indeed, he seems to be back where he started. Despite his philosophical conversion, that is, Apollodorus *still* seems to be "running around", except that he now goes about chastising non-philosophers while recording the speeches and deeds of Socrates.

That is not to say that Apollodorus's encounter with Socrates has been *harmful* for him. On the contrary, Socrates now provides a principle of order in Apollodorus's life, one that lends Apollodorus's life a shape and unity that it apparently lacked before. Further, as Socrates does with the young Alcibiades in the dialogue of the same name, Socrates has evidently brought at least some of Apollodorus's self-ignorance to light, and he has compelled Apollodorus to detach himself from his previous way of life, which Apollodorus has come to accept as an unhappy one. Yet, *contra* Osborne, for instance, I am doubtful that Apollodorus's "journey from his home to the city matches his departure from his old, non-philosophical lifestyle to the new Socratic life."<sup>16</sup> I am similarly skeptical that we should see Apollodorus as having made an "ascent from ordinary life to Socratic philosophy."<sup>17</sup> For given Plato's depiction of Apollodorus, it is doubtful that Apollodorus's separation from his older way of life

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Scott & Welton (2008), 29; Halperin (1992), 114; Hunter (2004), 27-28. Even Neumann (1965), 282, who insists that Apollodorus *is* a philosopher, admits that Apollodorus engages in no actual philosophical dialogue.

<sup>13</sup> See Sheffield (2006), 14 n. 8.

<sup>14</sup> Neumann (1965), 289, holds that Apollodorus's softness consists in his receptivity to a passion for philosophy. Yet as Corrigan & Glazov-Corrigan (2006), 16 n. 23, observe, *Phaedo* 85b-c suggests that the soft man (*malthakos*) does not investigate and question.

<sup>15</sup> Bury (1909), 6, argues for the alternate reading of the nickname, *manikos*. Rowe (1998), 130, however, plausibly defends *malakos* as making the most sense of the incongruity of Apollodorus's being savage toward others.

<sup>16</sup> Osborne (1996), 88.

<sup>17</sup> Osborne (1996), 90.

counts as a real step *forward* toward either Socratic philosophy or a happy life, any more than, say, Alcibiades' recognition of his self-ignorance (e.g. at *Alcibiades I* 127d and *Symposium* 215d-216c) marks similar progress for Alcibiades. Such separation and self-awareness serves, at best, as a precondition for such progress.<sup>18</sup>

### III.

So, how, and why, then, does Apollodorus go wrong? An answer to this question brings to light Apollodorus's *third function* in the *Symposium*. Through his portrayal of Apollodorus, Plato dramatizes how, in general, the nature of *eros* is prone to be misunderstood and, correspondingly, how *eros* is apt to be misdirected. In virtue of his misdirected *eros*, Apollodorus displays the basic – and commonly shared – misunderstanding of *eros*'s nature that Socrates seeks to overcome in his speech, and that the *Symposium* as a whole aims to correct. In particular, the attendees of Agathon's party consistently identify *Eros as a god*.<sup>19</sup>

In doing so, however, the various speeches, and common opinion, make the following mistake: they treat a *daimon* as though he were fully divine, *i.e.* complete and beautiful. That is, they misconstrue *Eros* not as a needy and desirous lover (τὸ ἐρῶν: 204c3), but, rather, as a fitting object of love (τὸ ἐρώμενον: 204c2). *Eros*, however, is not complete in this way. On the contrary, as already noted, *Eros* is an intermediate figure, neither wholly without resource, nor wholly without lack. And just as one (theoretically) misconstrues *Eros*'s nature when one identifies *Eros* as a divine, complete, and beautiful object of desire, so too one (practically) misdirects one's *eros* when one pursues *eros* as such an object. That is, one's *eros* is misdirected to the extent that one is “in love with love”, as opposed to the complete and beautiful objects and ends that would fulfill *eros*. Such misdirection of *eros* has implications for one's happiness, insofar as it directs *eros* away from those ends and goods that would provide it satisfaction.

As we have also seen, *Eros* – neither fully wise nor wholly ignorant – is desirous of wisdom, and so, a philosopher. The philosopher *qua* philosopher, in other words, embodies and personifies *Eros*. Thus, as scores of commentators have noted, Socrates' description of a tough, barefoot, scheming, brave *Eros* (e.g., at 203c-d) is something of a self-portrait. Insofar as the philosopher personifies *eros*, then, the philosopher himself would fail to be a fitting object of *eros*, at least not without qualification. For *eros* misdirected toward a philosopher would misconstrue a needy lover as a complete and beautiful object of love. Such *eros* would accordingly fail to be aimed toward its proper objects, *viz.* wisdom, contemplation of the Beautiful, and the immortal possession of the good. To that extent, an *eros* misdirected toward *eros*, or toward the philosopher as personification of *eros*, would fail to secure immortal happiness.<sup>20</sup>

Now, consider Apollodorus's stance toward Socrates. As Plato portrays him, Apollodorus idolizes Socrates. Apollodorus views Socrates as complete and godlike, and shows an intense erotic attraction toward him. Yet to the extent that the philosopher personifies *eros*, Apollodorus's stance toward Socrates reflects a more general error, misconceiving the daimonic as divine. This is an error that Plato aims to explore and correct in the *Symposium*.

<sup>18</sup> On such knowledge of ignorance, see Sheffield (2006), 61.

<sup>19</sup> Phaedrus: 177c; 178a-b; Pausanias: 180d-e; Eryximachus: 186e; Aristophanes: 189c-d; Agathon: 197c-e. Conversing with Diotima, young Socrates says that *Eros* “is agreed by all to be a great god” (202b6-7).

<sup>20</sup> Sayre (1996), 126-127, identifies this problem as it arises for Alcibiades. Cf. Sheffield (2006), 204, who observes in passing that Apollodorus makes a similar mistake. Bury (1909), XVI, identifies Apollodorus as “a worshipper of Socrates”. Cf. Rosen (1987), 10; Nussbaum (1986), 168; and Halperin (1992), 114.

Through his portrayal of the fevered but ultimately unhappy Apollodorus, then, Plato introduces and dramatizes this misconception of *eros*, and he suggests this misconception's implications for happiness.

#### IV.

On these grounds, I propose, Apollodorus plays a *fourth function* in the *Symposium*, an overarching "psychagogic" function intended to regulate how Plato's readers orient themselves toward the *Symposium* and the Socrates who appears in its pages. Through his depiction of Apollodorus, Plato attempts to inoculate the aspiring philosophical reader of the *Symposium* against some of the tendencies that Apollodorus displays.

To understand why Plato should feel compelled to use a character in this way, consider why, on Plato's view, we are prone to misconceive the nature of *Eros* as divine and loveable. The answer, I propose, lies in *Eros*'s resourcefulness in guiding one toward the good: for *Eros*, after all, is not wholly lacking, but has certain valuable features. Similarly, in virtue of the philosopher's own forms of resourcefulness, one can understand how one might come to misconstrue – and to pursue – the philosopher himself as a complete object of erotic striving.

Indeed, given Plato's depiction of Socrates in the *Symposium*, one can understand Apollodorus's unhealthy attraction to Socrates in particular. For in the *Symposium*, Plato portrays Socrates as relatively beautiful and resourceful, showing more of his paternal inheritance than his maternal. Thus, Socrates shows up to Agathon's party in an unusual guise, bathed and wearing slippers (174a; cf. 220b). He claims, astonishingly, to understand nothing other than erotic matters (177d8). And so, rather than ending on a note of *aporia*, Socrates reveals himself to be a skilled figure capable of trapping the beautiful and good, at least to some extent. His inventive account of *eros* builds, and improves, upon the prior speeches, and presents an overview, however dim and incomplete, of the truth about *eros*.

But to construe a figure like Socrates as godlike and complete, and to pursue him accordingly as an ultimate aim of erotic striving, is to overlook his needy and incomplete side, apparent in Plato's portrayal of Socrates in other dialogues. In such works, Socrates spends his days barefoot in the streets, seeking, but characteristically failing to attain, the wisdom that he is all too aware of lacking.

Given the *Symposium*'s dramatic portrayal of Socrates in a more beautiful, more resourceful, less aporetic mode than elsewhere, I suggest, Plato's readers are at special risk of lowering their aims as aspiring philosophers. Instead of working through the *Symposium* and questioning Socrates' views on *eros* – *i.e.* instead of approaching the *Symposium* in a mood of engaged *melete* – Plato's audiences are at risk of being lulled into merely "rehearsing" the work by reading it passively. They are at risk of accepting Socrates as a kind of "guru" figure, rather than as a spur to further thinking and progress of their own. Through his unattractive characterization of Apollodorus, a figure who does accept Socrates in just this way, Plato reminds his readers of this danger. Plato thereby aims to promote, or at least not to forestall, his audience's own philosophical progress.<sup>21</sup>

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