

## Defeating the Republic's Tyrant on the *Symposium's* Soul Couch

In the conclusion of his speech near the end of the *Symposium* (222b) Alcibiades warns Agathon against falling prey, as he had, to Socrates' wiles. Socrates in return accuses Alcibiades of attempting to provoke a quarrel between himself and Agathon. At this point Alcibiades is reclining between Agathon and Socrates. The ensuing back and forth between the three characters (222c-223a) results in Agathon moving from Alcibiades' left to Socrates' right, with the final order being Alcibiades, Socrates, Agathon. I argue that this incident has (at least) four levels of significance that have previously gone unnoted. First, it provides a structural and thematic parallel to book 9 of the *Republic*, with Alcibiades representing the quintessential tyrannical man (571a). Second, the three characters correspond to the three primary types of individuals identified in book 9 (581c), the lover of wisdom (Socrates), the lover of victory (Agathon), and the lover of gain (Alcibiades), and thus also to the three parts of the soul. Third, the incident is a dramatization that proves the argument of book 9, that the lover of wisdom is happier than the lover of gain, and that the tyrannical soul is least able to accomplish its desires (577c). Fourth, the incident is an allegorical representation of the argument made in book 9 and elsewhere in the *Republic* that justice stems from the reasoning part of the soul (Socrates) maintaining control over the desiring part (Alcibiades) with the aid of the spirited part (Agathon).

The incident in question here was passed over in silence for the most part by Dover (1980) and has more recently been dismissed as "a game of musical chairs" (Belfiore, 2012: 182). Others though have recognized great significance of one sort or another in this passage. Rhodes (2003: 409) saw it as "the third campaign in the war between the right pederasty and the tyrannical *eros*". K. Corrigan and E. Corrigan (2004) have drawn attention to the spatial

significance of the passage. Penney, revisiting Lacan's (1960-1961) psychoanalytical interpretation of the *Symposium*, has described it as "the key to deciphering the structure of love that binds together the banquet's key participants" (2012: 85).

The layers of significance I will argue for this passage derive from my larger work on the overall structural and thematic parallelism between the *Symposium* and *Republic*. On the macro level each work begins with an introduction "on the road"; each then presents five speakers/interlocutors who are followed by Socrates who turns the topic to education. The parallels in the conclusions of the two works (books 6-10 of the *Republic*) are more subtle, but ultimately Alcibiades dominates the conversation literally in the *Symposium* and figuratively in the *Republic*, beginning with a direct allusion to his arrival at the Agathon's symposium (book 6, 500b) and concluding with the focus on the tyrannical man in book 9. While I have discussed elsewhere what seem to have been Plato's purposes in this design of the two works, here my intention is to focus on the richness of understanding it provides for just one brief and otherwise enigmatic passage in the *Symposium*.

#### Works Cited

- Belfiore, E. *Socrates' Daimonic Art: Love for Wisdom in Four Platonic Dialogues* (Cambridge, 2012).
- Corrigan K. and Corrigan E. *Plato's Dialectic at Play: Argument, Structure, and Myth in the Symposium* (Penn State Press, 2004).
- Dover, K., ed. *Plato: Symposium* (Cambridge, 1980)
- Lacan, J. *Le Transfert: Livre VII (1960–1961)*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Éditions DuSeuil, 2001)
- Penney, J. *The Structure of Love: Art and Politics beyond the Transference* (SUNY, 2012).
- Rhodes, J. *Eros, Wisdom, and Silence* (U. of Missouri Press, 2003).